



THE

WILD CURATE

BY

J. MC. GRIGOR ALLAN.



THE WILD CURATE.

THE WILD CURATE.

A Novel.

BY

J. McGRIGOR ALLAN,

Author of

“THE COST OF A CORONET,” “NOBLY FALSE,” “THE LAST DAYS OF
A BACHELOR,” FATHER STIRLING,” “TRUE AND FEIGNED LOVE,”
“YOUNG LADYISM,” &c., &c.

“Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove :

* * * * *

Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle’s compass come :
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.”

—SHAKESPEARE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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F. V. WHITE & CO.,

31, Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.

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BOOK FIFTH.

THE CURATE RUINED, DISGRACED, DISMISSED!

CHAPTER I.

THE EVE OF THE TOURNAMENT OF DOVES!

It was the evening of the last day in April. On the first of May, there was to be a grand "Tournament of Doves," the last entertainment of Lady Honoria, before going to London for the season. Laxington House was full of company. Among the guests, were all those introduced to my readers in November, with but one exception. The American gentleman, Augustus Julius Cæsar Spry, Esquire, had (to use his own homely expression) "struck ile." That is to say, some wells of petroleum-oil on his estate, in Pennsylvania, had turned out so very valuable, as to require his personal superintendence "right away." The Yankee had embarked for "Noo" York, dazzled by visions of "realizing" a fabulous heap of

dollars. He dreamed of returning to England, and illustrating his Democratic principles, by purchasing a dukedom! Lady Honoria was the prime promoter of to-morrow's *Fête*; although she so far deferred to public opinion, as not personally to fire at the living targets. All the preparations were made. On one thing Lady Honoria had set her heart. She was resolved that the Curate should be not merely a spectator, but an actor in the "Tournament of Doves." Here, she had her misgivings he might refuse. In his sermon, he had condemned pigeon-trap shooting, as "the basest, meanest, most indefensible, and cruellest of all sports." She therefore determined to make his compliance with her will, the grand crucial test of his Love!

The conversation naturally turned on to-morrow's sport. Miss Wildgoose condemned it, on principle. She declared Pigeon-trap shooting as indefensible as the old brutal pastime of "Throwing at cocks," on Shrove Tuesday, now obsolete; or cock-fighting, still occasionally practised, though illegal.

"The last time I attended a meeting of the R.S.P.C.A. in Regent Street, I was delighted to hear worthy Mr. Colam announce that, owing to the Society's exertions, Parliament had at last placed the cock under protection, as 'a domestic animal.' I wish they would do the same with the poor pigeons. Why should the upper classes be privileged to be cruel?"

The Earl thought this savoured too much of levelling. Sport must not be interfered with, &c.

Miss Wildgoose said: "Reform must begin at the top, instead of the bottom of Society. Look at all our fashionable field-sports, hunting, shooting, coursing, angling, &c. All involve cruelty to animals. Not one can be defended by a humane person."

Young Squire Hawbuck burst into a horse laugh, and wondered how a rational being could say anything so "doosed absahd, you know."

The Curate sat mute!

Miss Wildgoose continued: "I should have thought the Reverend Mr. Witherington would have agreed with me. He preached against Aristocratic cruelties, *once*; a most effective sermon!"

"Lord Oddfish observed: "The reverend gentleman is older and wiser. He knows the other side of the question now. He hunts himself. A proof he does not think hunting wrong."

"No, my lord. The reverend gentleman has been perverted by your lax principles. Probably, also, there are other reasons for Mr. Allweather's hunting! Anyhow, a hunting-parson can never be an effective minister of the Gospel."

Lady Honoria quite understood the allusion to her influence over the Curate, accompanied by a significant glance of the speaker.

"Oh, come, Miss Wildgoose, you might as well say ladies should not hunt."

"I do say so."

"Say at once you consider *me* very wicked."

"I never make personal allusions."

Lady Honoria laughed.

Lord Oddfish emitted a very emphatic "Oh!"

"You may say Oh, and Ah, my lord. I do say a female foxhunter is a far more unsexed woman, than a female politician! We political women are sneered at as un-womanly. We compare favourably with ball-room women, and sporting women."

"That is a matter of taste," said Lady Honoria."

Lord Oddfish said: "Miss Wildgoose has now mounted her hobby. She rides furiously, as What's-his-name, a Scriptural party, drove."

"You mean Jehu, my lord," said Miss Wildgoose, smiling contemptuously. "Balzac observes that most women who ride well, are deficient in tenderness. Like Amazons, their hearts are hardened in a certain undefinable spot. Such women, in spite of their show of tenderness, are not to be trusted. Look at hunting ladies riding their horses to death, and complacently watching, while the poor 'Charley,' hunted home to his wife and family, is dug out, and thrown to the hounds as a reward for a good day's sport! That's a

fine school for tenderness, is it not? Those who defend such cruel sports, cannot consistently condemn Vivisection."

"I say nothing in defence of that cold-blooded cruelty," said Lord Oddfish.

All the sportsmen and sportswomen agreed with him, and loudly condemned Vivisection. But here, they trod on the corns of Doctor Downright. He waited calmly till the Earl had summed up the general denunciation, by saying that he would use all his influence to put down such a cold-blooded cruelty.

The Surgeon then said demurely ;

"Sportsmen condemning Vivisection, remind me of the old proverb, Satan reproving sin! When Vivisection is brought to the bar, Sportsmen are out of court. *They* at least should have the decency to be silent. To hear *them* swelling the popular cry, excites mingled indignation and contempt. For sportsmen to attack Vivisection, is vile hypocrisy. It is the stale device of a red herring trailed across the scent, to divert popular attention from their own forms of cruelty. Vivisectors may be broadly divided into two classes. Men, like sportsmen and sportswomen, who derive pleasure from inflicting pain! And men who, whether right or wrong, are totally unlike sportsmen, in being at least able to plead an elevated, unselfish motive. There are Vivisectors *and* Vivisectors. Majendie, inveigling a trusting spaniel, skinning it alive, and mocking its agonizing cries, with

‘*Taisez-vous ma petite!*’ was a monster! Vivisectors using *Anæsthetics*, may retort on Sportsmen, thus: ‘We inflict a limited degree of pain on lower animals, from the noblest of motives; a desire to diminish pain, disease and death. You Sportsmen, *fruges consumere nati*, live for nothing but to inflict pain! You are the scourges of animals. You cause more agony in one year, than Vivisectors cause in a century. And you have no higher motive than your own selfish pleasure and profit. If you had any sense of shame, you would begin reform with yourselves, before daring to attack Vivisectors.”

Of course, Sportsmen defended their favourite cruelties. Squire Hawbuck said, Hunting sustained fine breeds of dogs and horses. Captain Rasper, quoting from his own novels, said: “Hunting trains men and women to ride courageously, and forms a good school of cavalry. We have the finest cavalry in the world, but we have not enough. With fifty thousand first-rate cavalry, all cross-country riders, we might laugh to scorn the idea of invasion. That is, the invaders might come; but they would never get back again.”

“All that does not apply to women-riders,” sneered Miss Wildgoose.

But here, as previously at the hunting breakfast [Book 2, Chap. 3], she laid herself open to Lady Honoria’s retort:

“Why not, Miss Wildgoose? You go in

for perfect equality of the sexes, don't you?"

"I do."

"You want women-voters, women-members of Parliament, women-soldiers, mounted, and infantry. You distinctly called me an Amazon, and hard-hearted, because I am a good horsewoman. Yet you say women should emulate men in everything. I pin you down to your own principles. Why should I not fight, as well as you legislate? Is one more unfeminine than the other? Can you claim one right, and forbid the other? If you claim your right to be an M P., an office-holder, a Speaker, a Judge, a Secretary of State for War, a Lady Chancelloress, why may not I be a Captain, or Colonel of a crack cavalry corps?"

"Haw, haw, haw!" laughed Squire Hawbuck.

Lady Honoria continued. "I am not more out of my feminine place in the hunting-field, than you on the Hustings."

"Your ladyship is quite at home in the hunting-field," said Captain Rasper. "That's more than I can say of Miss Wildgoose on the Hustings."

"Miss Wildgoose requires no more *egging* on there," said Lord Oddfish wickedly.

"My lord, that's too *bitter* in the *mouth*," said Captain Rasper.

"'There's something *rotten* in the state of Denmark;'" said Lord Oddfish, "which women

politicians only can remove. We see how signally *they* soften political rancour ! ”

These mischievous allusions to Miss Wildgoose’s sad Election experience, were all the more difficult to bear ; because the Earl could not help smiling. And Miss Wildgoose had too much reason for thinking that, ever since that fatal exhibition of herself, she had lost ground in the Earl’s estimation. She looked disdainfully at her old enemies, and retorted :

“ I congratulate you, my lord, on your improved powers of quoting. Malignity and malice are wonderful aids to memory, and to literature also. I know a poor creature who, on the strength of such qualities alone, writes trashy novels and fancies itself a popular author.”

Captain Rasper, nettled at these words, and the fixed stare which accompanied them, replied : “ Was the poor creature a man, or a woman ? ”

“ The poor creature is a Captain in the army, and labours under the delusion that he is a man, a gentleman and a soldier ; though he does not hesitate to insult a lady ! ”

When the laugh occasioned by this sally had subsided, Miss Wildgoose addressed Lady Honoria : “ There are exceptions to all rules. Whatever may be urged for ladies indulging in men’s sports, most women draw the line at Pigeon-trap-shooting. Only ladies of rank

and fashion, degrade themselves by patronising a Tournament of Doves. Nothing can be truthfully alleged in its favour. There is no credit or use in killing them, except painlessly for food. These gentlest of birds are not allowed the *law* granted to other game. Shooters do not look them up. Pigeons are brought to their murderers, like sheep to the shambles. The pleasure of killing them is akin to the butcher's refined pleasure, in cutting a lamb's throat. Pigeons shot from traps, have hardly a chance of life. So much for the game. As for the pigeon-shooters, no risk, no pedestrian or equestrian exercise, no long exposure to weather, are involved in standing and murdering dazed birds let out of dark traps. In such sport, where is the *manliness* ? ”

“ Madam,” exclaimed Doctor Downright, “ you are perfectly right. I thoroughly agree with every word you say. If I could not make a better defence for Vivisection, than any which can be urged for pigeon-shooting, I should lay down my scalpel, and never take it up again. Well, ladies, as the gentlemen are mute, pray what have you to say in defence of your Sport to-morrow—a Tournament of Doves ? ”

What the ladies did say, was inconsistent, and foreign to the purpose.

Lady Ogle said : “ If pigeons were to be killed and eaten, they might as well be shot, as have their necks twisted.”

Mrs. Rippington asked: "Where was the cruelty of shooting them out of traps?"

Miss Heartfree asked: "Have they not got the same chance as other game?"

"No," said the Doctor. "The sudden blaze of light dazzles the pigeon. It cannot fly readily."

"That," replies Mrs. Rippington "makes it easier to hit; so there is the less chance of missing, or only wounding it."

"Then," said the Doctor, "you must to the general cruelties inseparable from the Sport, add the specific cruelties practised on the miserable birds, before putting them into the traps."

The ladies were, one and all, most curious to learn what these "cruelties" were.

"I shall have the painful pleasure of enumerating them," said Doctor Downright. "*First*: Gouging out one eye with the thumb nail, or blinding the eye with a pin, to make the half-blinded bird fly in a given direction! *Second*: Twisting the upper mandible of the bill, and sticking it through the lower mandible, to affect the bird's flight! *Third*: Crushing the fragile frame, by a severe squeeze, for the same purpose! *Fourth*: Tearing out the whole tail-feathers at one wrench! *Fifth*: Twisting the rump to disable the tail, and avoid the appearance of pulling out the feathers! *Sixth*: Sticking a pin in the rump, to prevent the bird sitting when the trap is drawn! Have I said

enough, ladies, to convince you that we much maligned *Vivisectors*, have no monopoly of cruelty?"

There was a general chorus of "How shocking!" from the ladies. "How dreadful! But was it all true? Surely not!"

"I can assure you, ladies, all these abominable cruelties are practised, more or less openly, at various gun-clubs, and shooting-matches in London."

"Possibly," said Lady Ogle; "but I don't believe such things are permitted at Hurlingham, and at private shooting-matches."

"Oh, no!" said Lady Honoria. "I would not sanction such atrocities. I give strict orders that the birds are not to be in any way mutilated."

"I am extremely glad to hear it. But such atrocities may be practised even at your shooting matches for all that."

"How, Doctor; do you doubt my word?"

"Not in the least, your ladyship. But do you personally see that your orders are fulfilled? Do you individually inspect every live target, before it is put into the trap?"

"No, certainly I do not. It would be impossible to do so, and witness the sport as well."

"Then, your ladyship cannot know what cruelties may be practised. And you may be certain that at all matches, where heavy betting goes on, these mutilations are inflicted on the wretched, tortured, vivisected birds—

Dissected, not for the advancement of science, and cure of disease, but merely to gratify the love of wanton slaughter! Every one who assists at these shooting-matches, as shooter, or spectator, either directly sanctions, or indirectly countenances, these horrible cruelties!"

The ladies looked blank. The gentlemen laughed scornfully. Miss Wildgoose summed up thus:—

"There, Doctor; it's of no use saying more. They cannot contradict you. They know it's all true. But, 'A man convinced against his will, Is of the same opinion still.' These ladies have just admitted that their favourite amusement is shockingly cruel, but they will not forego it. Don't expect so great a sacrifice from them. They have gratified their curiosity, by learning the cruelties actually inflicted on the poor birds, before shooting them. The ladies have relieved their feelings, by shuddering, and crying 'How shocking!' But if you expect any practical result from such a cheap display of sensibility, you will be disappointed. Not one lady has the moral courage to resist the temptation of appearing to-morrow, in a most ravishing toilet, to assist at 'The Tournament of Doves;' at which, all the fashionables for ten miles round, will be present."

"Shall you be there, Madam?"

"No, Doctor, I shall not. I have the courage of my convictions, both active, and passive."

“I respect you, Madam. You, at least, set a good example. You practice what you preach.”

“I wish the Clergy would do so. I don’t refer to their general conduct. But to their presence at a Tournament of Doves.”

During the whole of this conversation, the Curate was, as it were, upon tenter-hooks. He perceived a divided duty. He was in that most unpleasant mental state, when conscience urges one course, and inclination the directly opposite. He knew Dr. Downright was right; but looked at Lady Honoria, and was silent. The Curate felt he ought to have had the moral courage to express his convictions, and support Doctor Downright, and Miss Wildgoose; who alone maintained the cause of humanity against the whole company! But to join the forlorn hope, would be virtually opposing Lady Honoria. He could not do this. He felt he ought at least to follow Miss Wildgoose’s example, and not countenance by his presence, a sport which he did not approve. Yet he had not only promised to be present, but actually to join in the “sport!” He mustered up courage to offer a gentle remonstrance. He asked Lady Honoria to excuse him. It was so unclerical. He should incur such severe censure, by eating his own words, and actually taking part in a sport which he had so emphatically condemned from the pulpit!

With her most bewitching smile, Lady Honoria replied :—

“My dear Mr. Weatherall, why will you be so obstinate? I have set my heart on your joining us.”

“As a spectator. You will not insist on my taking an active part?”

“Oh, yes, I will. Why listen to all this nonsense? Pigeon-shooting is not more cruel than hunting, coursing, angling, or pheasant shooting.”

“But I never fired a gun in my life, at a living target.”

“The more reason you began now. You know, to oblige me, you have been practising for the last week, at a mark. Lord Oddfish says you improve wonderfully.”

“But before a living bird, and so many spectators, I shall be nervous. And then to shoot a gentle pigeon! It seems sacrilege——”

“Never mind! You will do very well. And you know your refusal to shoot, will not save the pigeons. They will be shot all the same. *And—in short, I wish it!*”

The Curate gazed at the proud, imperious beauty. All further objections died on his lips. “Who can control his fate?” In her hands, he was like clay. She could mould him into any shape. She had but to say, like the Roman lady, in Juvenal’s Satire:

“’Tis my command—

My will:—let that, sir, for a reason stand.”

What had *he* to do with right and wrong? He was in Love. His will was neutralised,

suspended, directed by that of Lady Honoria. He gently pressed the hand which she abandoned to him. He fondly anticipated the time, when that little hand would be his altogether, and murmured :

“Beloved Honoria, I will do everything you wish.”

“Now you speak sense, William.”

“And if I make this last sacrifice of principle, of duty, dear Honoria ; may I hope that you will see in it, an additional pledge of my conditional obedience to your irresistible influence ? Am I too bold in hoping that you will recompense me so far as to avow my real sentiments to your father ? ”

Let us hope, for the honour of humanity, and for Lady Honoria’s sake, that this trusting appeal to her good faith, touched her heart. That she rose above aimless flirtation, or even a worse motive (that of revenge, which had first induced her to cultivate the Curate’s acquaintance), when she replied : “*Nous verrons* ; but you must be guided by me. You must do nothing rash.”

“But it really seems as if our secret understanding was clandestine, underhand, and wrong. If you return my love, even your father’s displeasure cannot alter the fact. And, if he knew all, surely he would sanction, or at least not condemn——”

“Well—oblige me in this matter, and I promise you shall have your reward. Don’t squeeze my hand quite so hard. You press

the rings into my fingers. And listen to my conditions. You must assist at our Tournament of Doves to-morrow. *Cela va sans dire*. You must be here in good time ; for I want you to open the ball. You must fire the first shot."

"If I fire the first shot, hit or miss, you will not ask me to fire again?"

"No, I will not ; one shot is all I ask."

"And if I do this?"

"You will not find me ungrateful. If compliance with my whim, injures you with overstrict people ; the 'unco-guid,' as Burns calls them, your prospects may not materially suffer. You may depend on compensation. We will talk it over after the Tournament—have a thorough explanation—and—and—well, if matters should come to the worst——"

"You mean if the Earl should refuse his consent to our marriage?"

"Yes."

"What then, dear Honoria?"

"Why I shall be of age in a little over a year. I shall have at least two hundred a year in my own right, and—and——"

"Yes, dear Honoria?"

"If you will come and claim me, we could be married, with or without my papa's permission. Though I feel confident, he would not persist in refusing it. For I know he really loves me. And now, sir, do you want to eat my hand, or to betray our secret to the

whole room? Not a word more. Our *tête-à-tête* has lasted too long already."

-That night, the Curate went home, almost beside himself, with joy. He regarded Lady Honoria as his affianced bride. Never would he have found courage to propose that she should unite her fate with his, while in his present position. He always hoped to be a beneficed clergyman first. And now, she had voluntarily pledged her word to be his wife. But on this condition. To-morrow, he must appear before the *élite* of the County-families as a pigeon-trap shooter, a participator in a sport, which he had, six months before, condemned from the pulpit! But, after all, was it so much worse than hunting? Birds are less highly organised than mammalia. And even if it were, was he worse than the gentry, ladies, and *Clergy*, who would assist at, and countenance the "sport" by their presence. He looked beyond the price he had to pay for his promised reward. And yet he felt uneasy. He was troubled with grave misgivings. He did not dare to take his mother into his confidence. But the worthy old lady attacked him first.

"William, is this pigeon-match coming off to-morrow in Laxington Park?"

"Yes, Mother."

"Of course you will not be present?"

"I have promised Lady Honoria to go."

"Yes—but you might easily stay away. She will not break her heart."

"Why should I stay away?"

"You will ruin yourself, if you go."

"Why?"

"Such sport is very unclerical."

"I shall not be the only cleric there."

"You do everything that woman orders you."

"What woman?"

"Lady Honoria."

"She is a *lady* in every respect, mother."

"She has bewitched you."

"Pshaw! I am not a child."

"Well; you are always dangling after her, and neglecting your duty. She has perverted you, and to-morrow, she will complete the process, by exhibiting you in the character of a turncoat, a timeserver."

"You do not know her."

"I know her too well—far better than you do. You think she really cares for you?"

"I am sure she does."

"I know to the contrary. She flirts with you, to amuse herself in the country. There is one comfort. She is going to London soon, to plunge into all the gaieties of the Season. There, she will forget your very existence."

"Never."

"What infatuation! Can you really believe that Lady Honoria cares for a poor curate?"

"Why should she not? Am I a hump-back?"

"Absurd! I never saw a straighter person."

"Am I a fool?"

"You know perfectly well you're not. You have great talents."

"And I have had a good education."

"You may well say so. You took honours at the University."

"Why, then, should Lady Honoria not care for a poor curate? You know, mother, women are generally partial to the Clergy. Lord Chesterfield understood the Sex. He says he would rather be rivalled in the good graces of a lady, by a Captain, than by a Curate. Now, I simply illustrate this acute observation! I do not think myself inferior to the fine gentlemen and country squires whom I meet at Laxington House."

"You would be their moral superior, if you remained true to your sacred profession. You sink far beneath them, in your attempt to rival them as a worldling, and a man of fashion."

"You mean well, mother, but you do not know the world. Suppose, now, I should be on the eve of a great success?"

"Or of a great disappointment?"

"I say suppose—only suppose, now, that Lady Honoria does care for me—that she *loves* me, and that the Earl (who doats on her) should give his consent to our marriage; and present me with a benefice—what do you say to that?"

"I say you are crazy, if you think such a thing possible."

"But, suppose it should actually happen?"

"It cannot happen."

"Mother, will you never accept a hypothesis? Miss Wildgoose says: 'There is no difference between male and female minds.' I think there is, for this reason:—Women seem utterly unable to accept a hypothesis. I say, only suppose, for argument's sake, that such events were to take place?"

"Well, it would be the worst thing that could happen for you."

"How so?"

"Lady Honoria is utterly unfitted to be a poor man's wife."

"Well, but if I had a living of five hundred per annum, I should not be poor."

"The Scripture says: 'A woman, if she maintain her husband, is full of anger and much reproach.'"

"True; but Lady Honoria would not maintain me. She has only two hundred a year in her own right. At the Earl's death, the title and estate pass to his nephew."

"To whom she is at present engaged."

"*I know better!*" cried the Curate, with a vehemence which startled his mother. He added, hastily, "That is all gossip. She cares nothing for him. They are, in all respects, unsuitable to each other."

"But, my son, Lady Honoria, with a fortune of five thousand a year, would not make you happy. She would be always regretting that she had not done better. Still, you might not be utterly miserable on that handsome

income. But Lady Honoria and you keeping house on seven hundred a year, would be much poorer than we are, on two hundred and fifty. Her tastes, pursuits, and habits are all luxurious. She would come to look on you, as the cause of all her misery, and so learn to detest you."

"‘*Absit omen,*’ my dear mother. We must not pry too closely into the future. ‘*Amor vincit omnia;*’ Lady Honoria really loves me——"

"You seem very positive on that point."

"That’s the hypothesis, you know. If Lady Honoria really loves me, she would be happy with me, with her own two hundred, and my curate’s stipend of one hundred and fifty."

"Even if she thought so, and made the experiment, it would fail egregiously. *If Lady Honoria really loves you!* That shows your infatuation. The combined sentiments of whim, caprice, flirtation, and possibly a desire to humiliate you, for preaching against her favourite sport—you mistake these for true love."

Mother and son had their respective secrets, which each found it difficult to keep. The mother did not disclose her visit to Lady Honoria. Nor did the Curate reveal the actual fact of their engagement. So far, then, they were naturally at cross-purposes. Mrs. Weatherall could not sympathise with her son’s infatuation. He could not comprehend his mother’s prejudice and distrust.

“Why, Mother, will you persist in looking only on the dark side of affairs?”

“I cannot help it, my son. I feel greatly depressed. I feel sure your eyes will open to Lady Honoria’s real character, sooner than you think. I am glad she is going to London so soon ; for then I hope it will all be over.”

“Do you think I can ever tear her image from my heart?”

This was something more than mere metaphor, and empty declamation. The Curate suited the action to the word. He put his hand underneath his clerical waistcoat, and drew forth a miniature photograph in a gold locket, which he wore by a riband round his neck.

“Good gracious ! if he has not got her portrait ! Oh, he is very far gone.”

The Curate was alternately gazing on, and kissing the miniature.

“I will stake my existence on her truth. There, mother, look on that face and doubt the original no longer.”

Mrs. Weatherall took the locket and steadily scanned the likeness for some minutes. At length she said : “There is an expression on this face which ought to warn you. You have seen only the bright, the fair weather aspect of Lady Honoria’s character, as yet. At the first storm, you will see the dark side. And, unless I greatly err, you will not have long to wait.”

CHAPTER II.

THE TOURNAMENT OF DOVES—THE CATASTROPHE !

THE long-expected morning had arrived. On waking, the Curate experienced an unaccountable depression of spirits. The *tête-à-tête* breakfast with his mother did not cheer him. The good old lady persisted in her gloomy views of the previous evening. She did her best to dissuade her son from going to Laxington Park that day. The Curate respected and loved his Mother. But on this occasion, her arguments went in at one ear, and out at the other. His mind was made up. He knew that if he broke faith with Lady Honoria, he could not expect her to keep faith with him. So, he remained unmoved, by his mother's observation :

“You say Lady Honoria loves you. She shows it by exhibiting you, actually practising the sport which you condemned in your sermon! My son, a woman would never induce the man she loved, to make himself an object for scorn and contempt. Make up your mind at the eleventh hour, not to go. It will be easy to allege duty. You have plenty of parochial work in arrears.”

“So you are always taunting me, mother. I hope to be free from this slavery soon.”

For the first time, Mother and Son had something very like a quarrel, and parted in mutual displeasure.

In a secluded part of the park, by the side of the road leading to Laxington House, stood a gipsy woman in a red cloak and hood, holding a bundle; and accompanied by a man dressed in a smock frock, like an agricultural labourer. She appeared to have been importuning the man, for he replied, "No, no, mother Mumbo-Jumbo, not till you have done with your black art first."

"Didn't I prophesy as you wished, last time, the morning of the hunt? I told him there was great joy in store for him that day. And then I damped his joy, with a warning of some great danger; was I not right?"

"Right, yes! You never prophesied so near the truth in your life. The great joy and the great peril were not far apart. He had a narrow squeak for his life that very night——"

The man checked himself suddenly, as if he had said more than he intended!

"What do you mean?" cried the woman, eagerly scanning the speaker's face. "I heard of no peril."

"Never you mind, Mother. I only meant he ran great risk, riding home late at night, through the dark roads. *You* know what I mean."

"No, I don't. Explain yourself."

"Why you, and your respectable fraternity, were about. You missed a good prize."

“Oh! is that all you mean?”

“Yes; that’s all I mean. You might have secured a couple of watches and purses, and been twenty miles away, by next morning. A far better stroke of business, than robbing hen-roosts, or stealing linen from a hedge. Don’t you think so?”

“No more of your chaff, Mr. Blackadder—”

“Hush, mother; don’t mention names. Remember, I’m *incog.*, and don’t speak so loud. We can’t do business, if you lose your temper.”

“Well, keep a civil tongue in your head. Come, give me my instructions. The black-coat padre will be along presently. Is it to be good, or bad fortune this time?”

“Bad! I want him regularly frightened—made as nervous as possible.”

“What for?”

“Never you mind. Don’t be curious.”

“I’m not curious. Only you are too close. If you won’t be more confidential, how can I play my part?”

“Well, I can give you your cue. Warn him of a terrible impending trial.”

“Immediate?”

“Yes—immediate.”

“Do you know of any trouble in store for him?”

“Plenty! He owes more than a couple of year’s stipend. His creditors will soon look him up. But that’s not the kind of trouble I mean.”

“Something connected with the fair woman, eh?”

“Very likely. She’s going to London soon, and will probably forget all about the poor devil. But I don’t mean that exactly.”

“Then, will you tell me something more definite. How can I prophesy, if I don’t know?”

“Well said, Mother Hocus-pocus! Never prophesy, unless you know! I want you to come it strong about blood, wounds, violent death. That’s the sort of stuff to terrify!”

“Do you know of any such danger threatening him, or the lady he loves? Are you planning any mischief of the kind? Do you want to make me an accessory before the fact?”

“A likely thing, if I were, that I should tell you!”

“Because, if you are, I warn you, Mr. Blackadder, I wash my hands of the whole business. You may get some one else to help you, in your hellish work!”

“Pooh, pooh, Mother Warlock, don’t be so suspicious! Do you take me for a fool?”

“I know you to be a knave. But, unless you tell me something more of your secret game, you may keep your gold, and take care you are not sold. For, clever as you are, I might get more by warning him, or her, or both, of their danger——”

“Than by helping me. Well, then, Mother Black-Art, since you’re grown so scrupulous,

I had better make a clean breast. I suppose you've already guessed why I dislike the earwig?"

"Because he is a good—and you are a bad man."

"Complimentary! Guess again — a more particular reason."

"Jealousy!"

"Exactly so, Mother Cantrip; you've hit it. You know there's a Tournament of Doves this morning at Laxington Park."

"You mean Pigeon-Trap Shooting?"

"Yes; well, the cushion-thumper is to open the proceedings."

"How do you know that?"

"That's my secret, Mother Magic. Now, I want my favoured rival to get the sack. Nothing so likely to effect that, as to make him look like a fool, before all the Nobs and the woman he loves. You understand?"

"Yes."

"Very well; I want him awfully frightened, to shake his nerves, so that he'll funk, back out, break down; or, in some way, make himself ridiculous. She'll never forgive *that*. No woman ever does. You understand? That's all."

"And you have no design to wound, or kill, either one or the other?"

"Of course not. Upon my honour."

"Humph!" said the gipsy, as if she thought the guarantee rather weak.

"Well, Mother Artful, you won't leave me

in the lurch? You won't refuse to complete the job so cleverly begun!"

"No!"

"That's right. I'll get behind yonder beech. You bring him close, where I can hear every word. If you pitch it in strong, and frighten him, there's a goldfinch for you!"

"Agreed. Of course I won't speak in the road. I think I see him coming—vanish!"

The Curate approached; his head bent down, in a fit of musing. In his abstraction, he would have passed the woman, without recognition, had she not addressed him, while gazing earnestly in his face. He looked up, and recognised the gipsy, who had predicted good fortune on the memorable tenth of April.

"There's something there that's no canny," she said, scanning his features, as if she read his thoughts "A heavy trouble is before you. I could almost bid you turn back, and not seek the fair woman to-day; but you must dree your weird. What must be, will be."

He was evidently impressed by words so appropriate to his train of thought, and said: "What mean you? Speak plainly, woman. Tell me, if there be danger, where it lies, that I may avoid it."

"What I say is for your own private ear. This road is too public. We are observed, and may be overheard. Come a little way among the trees."

The proposition seemed reasonable. People were passing frequently. The Curate followed the gipsy a few paces from the road. Their position was such, that the Curate stood with his back close to—while the gipsy faced the beech—which concealed Blackadder.

“And now, my good woman, if you will speak plainly, you shall be no loser. Your prediction of good and evil, on the tenth of April, was singularly verified in both respects, before the lapse of many hours. I was that day the happiest, and might have been the most miserable, of men. I speak not of my own death, but of——”

He checked himself abruptly. The woman looked eagerly at him, and said in a very low voice, hardly above a whisper :

“You underwent some great peril that day—that evening?”

“We did, indeed! A ruffian fired at us. The bullet went through my hat.”

“Was there no previous attempt to rob—to extort money, either by begging, threatening, or violence?”

“Nothing of the kind. Our assailant, if not mad, meant murder! I knew not the danger, till it was over.”

“I knew it!” said the woman in the same suppressed voice. She was following up her own train of thought. The Curate thought her words referred to her skill in prediction.

“You did indeed predict some vague danger. And our narrow escape that very night, was

certainly a most singular coincidence. Accept this, as an earnest of what I will give you, if, by your timely warning, I can avert some threatening danger. Speak out plainly. Do not deal in vague generalities."

The woman looked at the crown which he placed in her hand, and said: "You are a generous gentleman. Would that I could assist you by speaking plainly! But the future is always obscure, even to those privileged to read it, and warn. It is obscure to prophets, apostles, seers, holy men and women—forbye the like of us, who tell fortunes by palmistry, and by cards. But your face tells me, you have had other warnings than mine. You are a free agent. It is in your power to turn back."

"Yes," said the Curate, in his agitation, thinking aloud: "So my mother said. It is in my power to absent myself, and so miss, and perhaps forfeit, my only chance of happiness. She would have a right to despise me, and recall her promise, if I could behave so basely, as to cancel mine. I will be a man. I will conquer, and subdue all these hysterical fancies; these selfish fears of the world, inspired by the 'Dweller on the Threshold,' as Bulwer paints it."

"Go on, then, like the brave man you are. You will have need of all your courage to face the heavy trial that lies before you this day."

"This day, say you?"

"If I do not err, it will come this day."

"Why—what can possibly happen this day? She cannot have changed since last night?"

Lover-like, his only idea of harm, was a change in Lady Honoria's sentiments towards him.

"But she may be changed by what may happen to-day."

"Impossible! What can happen to change her? Explain your meaning."

"I must not, I dare not. I cannot speak more plainly. I smell the scent of blood!"

"You smell the scent of blood!—pigeon's blood?"

"Something more, I fear." Here she added, with lowered voice:—"One drop of comfort I can give you. Whatever happens—*do not despair*. Good heavens!" she cried with a startled voice, "what is this upon your hand—*Blood?*"

"Yes—a mere nothing—I pricked my hand getting a bunch of May for some children."

"It is ominous—but go on. There is blood upon your hand, your own blood. I have a vision of more blood—but the house of Life is not broken into. Blood—horror—anguish—wailing. But, thank God—not *Death!* All may yet be well. Do not despair. Now, the vision is gone. What have I said?"

In vain the Curate tried to obtain something more explicit. She seemed to have a horror of recurring to the subject. All she said was "Do not Despair."

Either the gipsy was a most skilful actress ; or, she heartily revolted against the part she was hired to perform. There appeared to be a genuine struggle between the mechanical fulfilment of her promise to her accomplice ; and her desire to warn the Curate of some real danger, the nature of which she knew not. Yielding to the latter strong impulse, she beckoned him suddenly away from the beech tree. When she thought herself out of hearing by the concealed listener, she said to the Curate, in a low emphatic tone :

“You have a most dangerous, most unscrupulous enemy. Beware of——”

Before the name of Blackadder could escape her lips, she saw the disguised countryman emerge from behind the tree. The interview abruptly ended. The Curate departed. The gipsy joined Blackadder. If he had any suspicions that she had played him false, he judged it best to conceal them. She feigned to have conscientiously discharged her compact, and said :

“Well, Mr. Blackadder, you heard all. Did I not frighten the pore earwig? He is not in a proper condition to shoot. His hand is sure to shake. That was a neat wrinkle, to spot the blood upon his hand. I made a good deal out of that—did I not?”

“You did, indeed, Mother Marvellous. I really thought you were in earnest.”

“I was in earnest!” said the gipsy solemnly.

“Say no more, Mother. Here are your wages.”

He gave her a sovereign, adding: “Now, Mother Sorceress, our bargain is concluded. And we are once more strangers. You go your way. I go mine.”

Blackadder walked off rapidly across the park, in a direction opposite to that taken by the Curate. The gipsy watched the ex-Secretary out of sight. She then relieved her feelings by shaking her clenched hand, and uttering energetically these words:

“Aye, go your way, you skulking, cowardly, cold-blooded murderer in intention—if not in fact! You sneered at me and mine, as vagabonds and thieves. We are not *murderers*! I’ll be even with you, for your taunts and your chaff. You’ve paid me for doing your dirty, deceitful work. And now you dismiss me, as if all were at an end between us. You’ll find the old *Sorceress* not so easily shaken off. From what you let out, and what he said, I know now, *who* put a bullet through the Curate’s hat, on the night of the 10th of April! And I intend to find out what mischief you are hatching in your present disguise. As clever as you are, you may find Mother *Black-Art* too many for you, Mr. *Blackadder*! Perhaps you’ll live to regret calling the gipsy woman names, and treating her like the dirt beneath your feet.”

The Gipsy then sought a secluded spot, and proceeded to change her red, for a black

cloak, and hood, which she took from her bundle. Having folded up and put away her red cloak, and arrayed herself in her black mantle, she appeared quite another woman. She further completed her disguise, by pulling the hood well over her face. So that Blackadder himself might have passed, without recognising her. She then walked briskly in the direction which he had taken.

His recent interview with the gipsy was not calculated to raise the Curate's spirits. On arriving at Laxington House, he learned that the company had left, some time since, for the scene of the "Tournament." Lady Honoria had told the Curate on the previous evening, to go direct to this place. But in his mental agitation, he had forgotten, and had gone mechanically to Laxington House, thus adding to the loss of time caused by his interview with the gipsy. After walking across the Park in the indicated direction, he came in sight of the luncheon-marquee pitched near the extremity of the pleasure-grounds, separated from the farm-land by a deep ha-ha! A brilliant group of some forty or fifty ladies sat together on seats, rising in regular gradation. The gentlemen stood in a cluster by themselves. The traps were in front, close to the ha-ha. Beyond this, a mixed multitude had assembled to witness the Aristocratic "Sport," and to dispatch the wounded birds. Humane readers, who never witnessed a "Tournament of Doves," cannot

comprehend this truly Noble and Royal Sport. Here then, is a graphic description which almost synchronises with the date of my Story.

“Hurlingham is a very pretty place, but not for pigeons. Go to Hurlingham on the day of any great match. You will find it thronged with that idle male class called swells, who assemble under the admiring eyes of flirts. We do not mean that all the men at Hurlingham are idle swells, and more than that all the fashionable women there are flirts. Sufficient for our purpose, that this description fits a good many of the company. Well, there they all are, swells and flirts, in a very pleasant garden, waiting for something to happen, and wondering when it will begin. There they are, as described in ‘Lothair,’ with wonderful minuteness, down to that very clever retriever, whose super-canine sagacity is at once a delight and reproof, to the giddy crowd that applauds his feats. Pigeon-shooting, always irrational and brutalizing in itself, has begotten a species of gambling of its own; and matches at Hurlingham have grown to be a mere vehicle for idle betting. When we hear the odds against Sir Frederic This were 100 to 10, that Baron That was freely supported at 100 to 8, that there was much general betting; and hear it every day dinned into our ears by frequenters of ‘the park,’ that it is the most charming and exciting place on earth; we think it high time that such senseless, cruel, and costly

amusements should be put down—not indeed by law, but by what is above all law—the instinctive feeling which all true Englishmen, and all lovers of legitimate sport, have against practises alike brutalising, ruinous, and debasing, and revolting to humanity and common sense.” (*The Times*, August, 1870.)

A very strong opinion, delivered seventeen years since. Yet Pigeon-trap shooting flourishes now in 1887! Such scenes still disgrace our professions of Christianity and Civilisation. The presence of ladies at a grand pigeon-slaughter, watching, with delight, Princes and Noblemen doing the work of amateur butchers, practically illustrates the truth of Lady Wortley Montague’s severe, but salutary satire. She acknowledged to a lady at Constantinople, “that she had reason to prefer Mohammedan manners to our ridiculous customs—a confused medley of the rigid maxims of Christianity, with all the libertinism of the Spartans.”

It was late when the Curate arrived on the ground. He had kept the company waiting. Some said, he would not come; he had thought better of it, and “funked.” His mother would not let him assist at a “sport” which he had condemned. Lady Honoria alone insisted that the Curate would come, and resolutely refused to begin without him. His appearance was the signal for a whole volley of “chaff” from the gentlemen, and some frowns and scolding from the ladies, for

being so late. The Curate was to fire the first shot. Captain Rasper handed him the gun, already loaded and capped.

Lord Oddfish could not forbear saying:—
 “Thought you were going to disappoint us. So glad to see you, not as a mere spectator, but a participator, inaugurator. By firing the first shot, you sanctify our Sport. You’re not the only Parson here, but the only one who fires. The others are trimmers. They compromise—compound with their consciences. You go the entire animal, as our Yankee friend would say, if he were here.”

The varnish of compliment could not conceal the sneer. The Curate suspected Lord Oddfish was laughing at him—perhaps secretly despising him. And this was but a sample of the general feeling. *N’importe!* The Curate was playing for a great stake—the hand of Lady Honoria. He could bear the scorn of all, but one. *She* had promised him his reward. He would shut his eyes, and fire. He hoped he would miss. He did not wish a gentle bird’s blood on his conscience.

“Six to two on the bird,” exclaimed Squire Hawbuck, adding in an audible whisper:—
 “The Parson’s safe to miss. See how he handles his gun!”

Some men would exhibit more coolness in charging a battery, than in a *tête-à-tête* with a fashionable woman. Imagine, then, what it is to face a whole bevy of beauty and fashion. The Curate’s inquietude was pain-

fully visible, as he advanced to take up the required position in front of the ladies. All eyes were upon him. Even a far more confident man might have felt uncomfortable!

Lady Honoria noticed the Curate's nervousness. She came forward to speak to him, with the intention, and to some extent with the effect, of restoring his self-possession.

"So, Mr. Weatherall," she said, between jest and earnest, "You are here at last. You have to open the ball. You are my chosen knight in this Tournament of Doves, and must wear my colours." Suiting the action to the word, she pinned a rosette of blue ribands on the lapelle of his coat. "I hope your nerves are braced to do execution, and that you will do me credit."

The Curate tried to falter out some commonplace, about there being so many present better shots than himself. Lady Honoria talked for both. She rattled on in strangely high spirits, as if she had been what the Scottish people call "*Fey*," or predestined to some calamity!

"In other words, Sir Knight, I stand to lose no end of gloves, if you don't bring down your bird. So be steady. Remember my instructions. Do not fire immediately the trap is drawn, but be ready. Give the bird time to rise. They generally fly to the left."

While Lady Honoria was thus encouraging the Curate, the ladies were criticising him.

"Poor fellow! He looks very ill at ease," said Lady Ogle.

"I should not wonder if he threw down his gun, and refused to shoot after all," said Mrs. Rippington.

"It would be a sad mortification to Lady Honoria."

"It would serve her right, for forcing a Clergyman to do what he is evidently most unwilling to do."

Perhaps it was the fear that the Curate might, at the eleventh hour, refuse to shoot, which made Lady Honoria remain near him. She showed him where to stand. Then, instead of returning to her place among the ladies, Lady Honoria withdrew, as if mechanically, a few paces to the left. Probably she was too much absorbed in watching her lover's awkwardness and trepidation, to be quite conscious of the interest she displayed, and the general observation it challenged.

The Curate had heard that expert marksmen often fired, and killed, without raising the gun to the shoulder. He thought he would do the same. At a signal, the trap was drawn, but the bird did not rise immediately. Seeing that he did not raise his gun to the shoulder, Lady Honoria clapped her hands, and called: "Now, be ready to fire!"

At the sound of the loved voice, the Curate mechanically turned half-round. The gun, at full cock, projected at right angles from his body, and pointed straight at Lady Honoria.

The men uttered a hoarse shout; the ladies a shrill cry. "Raise your gun!" "Lower your gun!" "Aim at the bird!" "Face the trap!" A host of conflicting cries from the gentlemen on his right, and from the men and boys in front, helped to addle the Curate's brain. As if all these were not enough, a man in a smock-frock suddenly stood up among the crowd beyond the ha-ha, and flung a firework with deliberate aim and unerring precision. The missile struck the Curate upon the breast, fell to the ground, and began exploding and detonating. The poor fellow winced at such an unexpected projectile. Possibly he thought he was shot. The gun was involuntarily discharged. The pigeon flew unharmed away. A loud female scream of agony was drowned in a roar of execration. Lady Honoria lay bleeding on the grass! Gentlemen rushed to the spot; some ladies fainted, others screamed. Two or three had presence of mind enough to proffer help.

Fortunately, skilled assistance was at hand. Dr. Downright knelt down, examined the wound, gave the necessary orders, and, in some degree, pacified the excited crowd by the assurance that the wound was not mortal; that there was no immediate danger. Lady Honoria was at once carefully conveyed in a carriage to Laxington House, where the wound was dressed. But how shall I describe the Curate's anguish? In one brief moment, flashed across his brain, a whole series of

recollections, prognostics of the dreadful event, no longer in the shadowy vista of futurity, but already past. His sermon, in which he had denounced the Tournament of Doves ; his reference to the awful catastrophe in "*Der Freischutz*"—He knew now, but too well, why he had trembled and broken down ! Then his fearful dream, during his first visit at Laxington House, when he had seen in vision, what he had now beheld in reality—Lady Honoria's face streaming with blood ! Then the gipsy's vaticination, to be so speedily fulfilled ; his unaccountable depression—the presentiment of evil. Lastly, the crushing sense of the awful catastrophe—that his hand had unwittingly struck down the being he best loved on earth ! This culmination of horror almost bereft him of his senses. The gun fell from his relaxing grasp. He stood for a few moments the image of despair, and then would have fallen, had he not been supported. But the Father's condition challenged sympathy almost as much as that of the Lover. For some minutes, the Earl was beside himself with grief. He raved ; he menaced with his fists the unhappy Curate ; called him the murderer of his only child ; and was only restrained by force, from committing an assault !

Meantime, Lord Oddfish and Captain Rasper devoted themselves to the Curate. They loosened his neckcloth, bathed his face with water, and held smelling-salts to his nostrils.

At length he recovered sufficient consciousness to ask some hurried, incoherent questions.

"Is she dead? Have I killed her?"

"Nothing of the sort, my dear fellow," said Lord Oddfish, who now bitterly repented his own share in the practical joke which had ended so tragically.

"Do not mock me. Let me know the worst. Does she really survive?"

"She does—she lives. The doctor says she is sure to get over it. The wound is superficial."

"Thank God!" cried the Curate. They had not the courage to tell him the whole truth then. The doctor's real opinion was to this effect. That the wound itself was not mortal, provided the patient was able to rally from the severe shock to the nervous system. He greatly feared Lady Honoria would lose the sight of her left eye. To have told the whole truth to the Curate at this moment, might have been equivalent to giving him his death-blow!

"Poor fellow!" said Lord Oddfish aside to Captain Rasper. "He'll know the truth only too soon. Why add to his anguish? After all, it wasn't altogether his fault. I wish I knew the villain who threw that cracker."

"Some fellow in a smock frock," said Captain Rasper. "He's responsible for all the trouble. I hope they'll catch him. But I fear he got away. Whatever happens, the Curate is certainly not to blame."

Thus they soothed the unhappy Curate with white lies ; got him away ; put him into a carriage, and drove him home.

The Curate obtained some temporary relief from relating the occurrence to his mother. The old lady was inexpressibly shocked at what she thought, in her heart, was a judgment on Lady Honoria. Mrs. Weatherall was all the more convinced of this, by remembering her own warning to that young lady, on the occasion of the visit recorded in Book III., Chapter I. Both were punished. Lady Honoria, for deluding the Curate. He, for yielding to the temptation, and taking part in the Tournament. But the worthy lady kept these thoughts to herself, and endeavoured to comfort her son, and check his unavailing and bitter bursts of grief. She told him the truth, that, though the luckless instrument of wounding Lady Honoria, he was morally as innocent as a child. That it was an accident, at least as far as he was concerned, the result of an unhappy plot to place him in an unclerical position. And that the most guilty was the person, unknown, who had flung the firework at such a critical moment. She hoped this man would be discovered and punished, as he richly deserved to be ; for it was impossible to acquit him of *malice prepense*. Yet even for *him*, the Christian lady had a word of charity. "And yet," she added "he must now be suffering the torments of conscience ; for, of course, he did not for

a moment think that his mischievous folly would end in blood!"

That night, the Curate got some troubled rest. But early next morning bad news reached the cottage. Report said Lady Honoria was in a very critical condition. She had not rallied from the shock to the nervous system, and under any circumstances, even if she recovered, she would permanently lose the sight of one eye. The Curate had begun to hope for the best, and to take some comfort. No sooner did he hear this grave news, than he suffered a severe relapse. Medical attendance was summoned, the Curate was put to bed, but it was very difficult to keep him there. In his partial delirium, it required two strong men to hold him down. His dominant idea was that he must see Lady Honoria, and obtain her forgiveness before she died!



CHAPTER III.

LADY HONORIA'S CALAMITY.—THE CURATE'S
RUIN.—RESPECTIVE TREATMENT OF CREDITORS
BY RECTOR AND CURATE!

It is superfluous to say that Lady Honoria had the best medical attendance. In addition to Dr. Downright, two eminent London practitioners were summoned. They all agreed that the accident itself did not involve more than the loss of an eye. Yet the shock to the nervous system, and the patient's prostrate condition, complicated the case to the extent of causing serious apprehensions of ultimate recovery! Medical skill, careful nursing, precautions, Lady Honoria's youth, and strength of constitution, triumphed in the end. She became convalescent. But just in proportion as her frame recovered strength, she had to contend with "a mind diseased." Not that her intellects were disordered; but that she suffered morally, under a depression of spirits; the natural result of a calamity which robbed her of beauty, and made life an altered scene! London Fashionable Society had been expecting their dear friend to play her accustomed part in Vanity Fair during the Season. Society managed to get on without Lady Honoria. Society lamented the "Shock-

ing Accident at Laxington Park " for nine days! Society then pursued its own selfish pleasures, and forgot all about "poor dear Lady Honoria." But in Laxington, the melancholy affair naturally formed the subject of interest for months. While Lady Honoria's life hung in the balance, people expressed only direct sorrow, sympathy, and commiseration. But when, in four or five weeks, Lady Honoria was known to be out of danger, then commentaries became more free.

Miss Verjuice, in discussion with her friend Miss Straitlace, said :—" Well, for my part, I am not uncharitable. But I regard the accident as clearly a judgment on Lady Honoria, for her unfeeling flirtation with that poor, weak-kneed Curate. It is a judgment upon both of them ; on her for tempting ; on him for yielding to the temptation. If he had not taken part in the "Tournament of Doves," as they call their wretched butchery of birds, the accident could not have happened. Pretty Clerical pastime! And what a fuss about the loss of an eye! All because she is a lady of quality! Old Dame Howlett met with the very same accident, I think on the very same day. A mischievous boy was shooting sparrows, and shot her in her own garden. She lost her right eye, while sitting harmlessly in her own garden. Lady Honoria was encouraging a Curate to kill a harmless dove! Some people would say it served her right. I do not go so far as that. I regard it as a

Judgment! *The Laxington Journal* reported the loss of Dame Howlett's eye in six lines; while about six columns were devoted to record, and lament, the 'Terrible Calamity' at Laxington Park! The parish doctor cured Dame Howlett; while three doctors were fee'd to hold a consultation on Lady Honoria's case. She recovered, in spite of all three! Well, thank Heaven! *I* am no respecter of persons."

"Nor *I* either," said Miss Straitlace. "I agree with you. It is a Judgment. Another cup of tea if you please."

These maiden ladies kindly undertook to regulate public opinion in Laxington, on matters and things in general. There was some truth in the strictures of Miss Verjuice. But, like the rest of her sex, her *forte* was not *Justice*! Abstractedly stated, the loss of an eye is as great an injury to one person as to another. As regards physical pain, there was perhaps little, if any, difference between the two cases. Yet, the statement that Lady Honoria had lost no more than Dame Howlett, was utterly untrue. To a woman upwards of seventy, the loss of an eye is undoubtedly a calamity. Yet her very loss excited sympathy, caused greater kindness to be shown to her, and materially increased her stock of little comforts. Dame Howlett was thus placed beyond the necessity of labouring for her living. Paradoxical as it may seem, the loss of an eye was an advantage to her! Personal mutilation is not always a misfortune. An

officer was so desperately wounded at Albuera, that the surgeons thought it would be necessary to amputate his right arm close to the shoulder. Ultimately the arm was saved, and he obtained the full use of it. "Were you not glad," I said, "that they saved your arm?" "No," he replied, "I wish they had amputated it. For then I should have had a pension."

But this argument of Compensation did not apparently apply to Lady Honoria. To her, the loss of an eye seemed worse than death itself. By this terrible calamity, Lady Honoria suffered, in addition to physical pain, an unknown and incalculable amount of mental anguish. An eclipse of her beauty, almost equivalent to moral death. The haughty fashionable patrician lady had received admiration in her right, as a Queen of Beauty and Love. Pictures and engravings had made her loveliness known far beyond the circle of personal acquaintance. She had played with hearts. She was to learn by bitter experience, the unutterable value of Love which is wholly independent of ephemeral attractions—such Love as Shakespeare describes in Sonnet 116! Lady Honoria was now openly pitied by plain, unaccomplished, under-bred women, whom she had once despised. To regard the calamity from the lowest, meanest, most prosaic, and practical point of view, as many did: Lady Honoria had suddenly lost all that marriageable value, dependent on physical

beauty. Her altered condition had not been produced gradually, by time, but all at once. Would Lady Honoria be able to learn the lesson which such a loss involved? Assuredly then, there is no undue leaning to Aristocracy, in thinking Lady Honoria's loss of an eye, a far greater misfortune to her, than a similar loss was to old Dame Howlett!

The Earl learned the true state of the case from Lord Oddfish, Captain Rasper, and others. His lordship's fury somewhat abated: but he had not sufficient religion and philosophy to pardon the Curate. His lordship could not admit that the Curate was less to blame than Lady Honoria herself. And, in her present state of suffering, there was certainly some extenuation for her father's partiality towards an only child, whom he idolised. But, as we shall see, the Earl's injustice proved the main cause of the Curate's ruin! In all such cases, a scapegoat is required. The person most responsible for the accident, was the countryman who had thrown the grenade. All efforts made to discover him had failed. The offer of a handsome reward did not bring the offender to justice. Either the rustics did not know, or would not tell. Several had seen a stranger in a smock-frock throw the cracker. But, in the confusion following the accident, the man had made his escape. The police had no clue to trace him. The Earl and others, not having the real criminal to

punish, persisted in laying the blame on the unhappy Curate. For some time, indeed, it seemed probable that he would escape all further trouble and persecution, by dying. But youth and a sound constitution (never weakened by the dissipation in which most young men indulge) carried him through. Had the Curate died, he would have been forgiven. Justice would have been done to his memory. But, as he recovered, all who sought to pay their court to the Earl and Lady Honoria, made the Curate the scapegoat. Meantime, the unhappy man slowly languished back to a sort of life-in-death. He recovered his self-control so far, that there was no further need to watch him. His previous frantic violence was succeeded by a settled melancholy. No wonder! A gulf now yawned for ever between him and Lady Honoria. Thanks to the accomplished efforts of Miss Minckes, and other sycophants, Lady Honoria could not even tolerate the mention of the Curate's name! As for receiving from him personally, or by letter, his version of the accident, either course was quite out of the question!

Suddenly, when his fortune was approaching its culmination, a baleful shadow had fallen on the Curate's life. How wonderfully had the gipsy's prophecy been fulfilled! Did he ever think of her last emphatic words? "*Do not despair!*" Apparently not. He seemed, in every point of view, a ruined man.

No hope of marrying an Earl's daughter! No further friendship or good offices from the family. No chance now, of the Earl's interest to get him a benefice. But there was the Church! Now was the time for Christian sympathy, both clerical and lay, to solace a wounded heart! How did the Rector behave? Like himself! The man who killed four inoffensive animals, to spite his own Son, was not likely to lose this glorious opportunity of crushing his Curate, to whom he had long owed a grudge! The Curate had now lost all his Aristocratic friends. He was in debt. He had lost the woman whom he adored. Almost every tongue was against him. He was in that dangerous state of depression, when it requires great moral courage, and a strong sense of religious responsibility, to withstand the temptation to commit suicide! A generous Enemy would have pitied him—perhaps helped him. How should the Christian Pastor have behaved?—the man to whom our Reformed Church paid £900 per annum to teach Christianity by precept and example! The Rector thought it his duty to take the long-premeditated step of dismissing the Curate! This was done in the curtest manner. For the Rector had been greatly exercised in mind, as to whether there was any real engagement between Lady Honoria and the Curate. The Rector had often asked himself how he ought to act; whether hold his tongue, or curry favour with the Earl, by

telling him what he did not know, but suspected? Indeed, it had required all the tact and authority of the Rectoress, to keep the Rector silent. Now, he thought himself perfectly safe. The Curate was in disgrace. Now was the time for his Ecclesiastical superior to turn his back upon "the poor working man of God," who had slaved for him faithfully for 3 years, 6 months! True, the Curate had been somewhat remiss and "wild" for the last four or five months. He had been infatuated by a beautiful woman, who had laid herself out to captivate him. There was extenuation for his error. It had brought its own punishment. At least, the Curate had never done anything mean, base, or morally wrong!

All these considerations would have pleaded in the Curate's favour, with a good man. They did not weigh a feather with the Rector. He saw his opportunity and gratified his wish, to be revenged on a far better man than himself. So, the Rector suddenly discovered that he could no longer continue to wink at the Curate's gross neglect of parochial duty! The Rector would have liked to allege as an excuse, the Curate's hunting, and his unlucky shot at "The Tournament of Doves." But even the Rector's hypocrisy, and toadyism to the Earl, could not carry him quite so far as this! Possibly, also, he feared the unpleasant rejoinder to which such a charge would have laid him open. He himself had assisted at

the 'Tournament. True, he was only a spectator. But, had he been invited to shoot, he would have complied with the request, and the accident might have happened to himself. He therefore confined himself to the general charge of neglect of duty. As Lord Oddfish said, "The Rector was far too lazy himself, to keep an idle Curate."

To crown the Curate's troubles, the tradesmen to whom he was in debt, all sent in their bills at once! While he dined at Laxington House, and rode hunting with Lady Honoria, his creditors were most civil and obsequious. Now, they could wait no longer! Mr. Gnatstrainer improved the opportunity, by preaching against the Curate, and held forth from the text, "Pride goeth before a fall." It was a powerful discourse; but some, even among Dissenters, thought it showed a lack of Charity! I may here mention that Mr. Gnatstrainer had received the news of his daughter's elopement, with a storm of raving and cursing, hardly, if at all, inferior to that of the Rector. There was, however, a great distinction in the after conduct of each. Mr. Gnatstrainer heard the particulars of the Rector's deadly rage; how he had killed his son's favourite animals, cursed and very nearly killed his son; had driven him from home, an implacable enemy! No sooner did Mr. Gnatstrainer hear these things, than he at once resolved to forgive his daughter. He may have acted from policy, seeing that his daughter had

married a *gentleman*, though a poor one. Mr. Gnatstrainer may have thought that Mr. Headlong, Junior, might still enter the Ministry, and obtain the living at his father's decease. The Dissenter may have desired to illustrate personally the superiority of Dissent over the Establishment. He did say, he would show himself more forgiving than the Rector. Or, he may have been actuated by pure paternal feelings. Whatever his motives, Mr. Gnatstrainer did show himself a much better Father than the Rector! The Dissenting grocer wrote to his daughter, forgiving her. He did more. He settled on the young couple, an allowance of two hundred a year, until the husband should be able to do something. The letter contained a cheque for fifty pounds, the first quarter's payment in advance. A most seasonable supply, as the young couple were at the end of their scanty stock of ready money.

The Rector and Curate were, in most respects, complete opposites. But the contrast was, perhaps, never more apparent than in their respective treatment of their creditors. As if to emphasise the contradiction in their characters, both were in debt, and their pecuniary difficulties came to a crisis at the same time. As already stated (Chap. 6, Book 4), the Rector had only obtained time from his creditors through their expectations that his son would marry the wealthy heiress, Miss Askew. This hope

was permanently destroyed by Mr. Headlong, Junior, marrying Miss Gnatstrainer. The Rector's creditors immediately renewed their demands for payment. The Curate owed £250. The Rector about £2,500. The poor, disgraced, and ruined Curate, behaved like an honest man. He called on each of his creditors in Laxington, and told them the whole truth. He said; "You have two courses. To make me a bankrupt. You will ruin me, for I shall give up everything; but your share will be very little. Whereas if you give me time, I pledge my word to pay every penny, principal and interest. I shall get another curacy, live on a bare pittance, and hand over the rest of my income, until I stand clear of debt." These straightforward words, the honest face and manner, touched even some who were prejudiced against him as "a wild curate," and hunting parson! The majority of his creditors agreed to wait for their money. A pig-headed minority said they would not. They abused the Curate, for running in debt. They had been the most servile in his prosperity.

They were now the most insolent in his adversity. But even *they* observed the meekness with which he bore their rudeness. After he had gone, their feelings were somewhat relieved by insulting one to whom they had been cap-in-hand. When these creditors reflected coolly, they perceived the folly of forcing an honest man to be a bankrupt, and

accepting four or five shillings in the pound, instead of waiting, and receiving their demands in full. They therefore stormed, grumbled, and threatened; but secretly resolved to make the sacrifice of waiting till they could get twenty shillings in the pound!

It would have been difficult to better the Curate's conduct to his creditors. In theory, the Rector should have behaved equally well. He had been seven times as long in "Holy Orders," and consequently should have been seven-fold more pious, than the "Wild" Curate. Piety certainly ought to involve ordinary Honesty! But the Rector had also been a great deal longer in the world. It was not to be expected that he would copy the conduct of the Curate he had dismissed for neglect of duty! The Rector (as we shall see) acted like a thorough worldling, varnishing over his craft, with a glaze of characteristic hypocrisy. He did indeed, condescend to answer the pressing letters of his creditors. But he wrote to them by no means in an humble manner. He hinted plainly, that they were guilty of Sacrilege, in pressing him, a Priest, a beneficed clergyman of *The Church* (as if there were no other Church but the Established Church of England), for money which he could not then pay, owing to his son's filial disobedience! He accused them of oppressing the Poor! (Assuming that he, enjoying £900 from his living, and £300 from his wife, was a poor man.)

He flatly refused to give up any portion of his income. He answered their threats of legal proceedings, by daring them to do their worst. Providence would protect him against the machinations of the wicked, &c., &c. Of course, the Rector said nothing of the serious quarrel between himself and his son. The reverend writer wished it to be thought that his son might yet qualify for the reversion of the living. The Rector even hinted in his letter, that Mr. Gnatstrainer, a very wealthy tradesman, had forgiven his daughter. The Rector's creditors were welcome to all the comfort they could get out of that!

The Rector sealed this letter with his family coat of arms. He knew more of Heraldry than of Theology. He had frequently found the good effects of using this large imposing seal. In these days of gummed envelopes, wax was a novelty. And this seal was an attractive object. It flattered the vanity of a creditor. He stuck the letter in his card-rack; showed the seal to admiring visitors; and granted time to his debtor. It was flattering to have a correspondent with such a seal. Over his wine, the Rector had often boasted of this manner of satisfying a creditor, and hinted that the Curate was a fool for not trying a similar plan. But the Curate had no coat of arms. He used a plain seal, without crest, and the simple motto "*Selon Devoir.*" And the Curate thought

the Rector's use, or abuse, of his grand seal, a dishonourable "dodge." For some time, the big seal had lost its power of charming creditors. They no longer admired it; but regarded it with contempt and derision. The Rector's written language was not conciliating to creditors, who had already shown much forbearance, and could obtain nothing "on account." His chief creditor resolved to levy on the Rector's goods and chattels; and wrote to that effect. As the *persona ecclesiæ*, the spiritual head of the parish, the Rector thought his personal affairs must interest his parishioners. He turned his pulpit to account, in contradicting damaging and derogatory rumours. In his sermons, he referred to himself as an oppressed and persecuted man, and quoted Scripture-texts, as if they had been expressly written to describe his present condition! He was the perfect, upright man, persecuted by the ungodly. But he put his trust in Providence, and trusted to escape the snares laid for him. Thus, the Rector excited much sympathy, chiefly among his younger female parishioners, and others, who knew nothing of the real facts, and believed that wicked grasping creditors persecuted their good Rector, who would pay if he could! There were some who believed the creditors, version, that the Rector was a fraudulent debtor, who could pay largely on account, if he would!

The Rector was thus actually prostituting

the pulpit, to evade payment of his lawful debts. He was, as far as possible, taking "the benefit of clergy," by exciting local public opinion against his creditors, and so trying to terrify them from putting the law in force against a clerical debtor. The principal creditor was all the more exasperated by such dishonourable manœuvres, and determined to have his money. He considered the Rector very much in the light of a clerical swindler, who had long deceived him, and had now added insult to injury. Creditors knew that the Rector had £900 from his living, besides perquisites, fees, &c., and £300 from his wife, who also possessed some very valuable family jewels; that the Rector displayed a very handsome service of plate at his grand dinner parties, which he periodically gave, in spite of his poverty. It was also known that the Rector had a large and valuable library, and a house full of costly furniture. The firm, therefore, resolved to risk the odium of selling up a beneficed clergyman. They calculated, with apparent reason, that matters would not be allowed to go so far. That when they once put a man in possession, the Rector would be glad to come to terms. The grand difficulty would be to get the man in. Once in, things would follow the usual course. Rather than see his goods seized, the Rector would pay, if not the whole demand, a large sum on account, and with this, they would rest satisfied for the present. But the firm

of Longcredit and Co. reckoned without their —*Rector* !

When the Rector spoke about trusting to Providence, he meant more than a mere pulpit metaphor. He had a practical scheme in his head. There was no attempt made to exclude the myrmidons of the law. All the precautions planned to elude, and overcome the expected difficulty of effecting an entrance, were found superfluous. The man was put in possession with the greatest ease. The sheriff's officer congratulated himself on the chief difficulty being over. He thought the "trick" was done. But when the inventory of the goods was made, these were found not nearly enough to cover the debt; hardly enough to cover the expense of a sale by auction. The family jewels had disappeared! The service of plate had disappeared! The man in possession, had been in most gentlemen's houses in the County, as a professional guest. He was not astonished at the disappearance of the jewels and plate. He no more expected to see such small and portable articles of value left, than to find the drawing room floor paved with sovereigns. But the valuable library and costly furniture had also disappeared. The library showed long ranges of empty shelves; the drawing-room, dining-room, the best bed-rooms, were dismantled and unfurnished. Where had all these bulky articles gone? The Rector knew. The Churchwardens also knew. The man in

possession did not know ; though perhaps he had his suspicions. After he had been withdrawn by the disappointed firm of Longcredit, the truth leaked out. In these degenerate days, a clerical debtor cannot elude his creditors by taking sanctuary, but his furniture can ! The Rector had saved the most valuable portion of his goods and chattels, his books and furniture, by having them removed to the vestry of his parish church ! *

The Rector's treatment of his creditors was what the Yankee, Augustus Julius Cæsar Spry, Esq., would call "smart." The Rectorial conscience was not troubled. The furniture was *his* ; the parish was *his* ; the church was *his* ; the vestry was *his*. In a free country, every man can do as he likes with his own. This last sharp contrast with the "Wild" Curate's treatment of his creditors, did not raise the Rector in general estimation. Neither did it seem to do him particular harm. People said, "It is like him." No one seemed in the least astonished. His personal character had suffered so severely by previous misconduct, especially by his treatment of his son, that it could hardly be more damaged. This last shabby trick was certainly not calculated to increase respect for the Church which he misrepresented. Dissenters sneeringly asked :—
"Where is the Ecclesiastical machinery to

* This incident (like that of the umbrella, Chap. vi, Book iv.) is an actual fact. One and the same clergyman was the hero of both actions !

punish such dishonest conduct? You boast yourselves a branch of the true Church. You abandon *us* to the uncovenanted mercies of Christ. Yet, your Rector (the *Gentleman* placed, by your Church, to be a model to all of us) swindles his creditors with impunity. You allow such a *rogue* still to preach to you, to pray for you, to baptise your children, to marry, to bury, to administer the Sacrament! You pay respect to him, as conventionally *Reverend*. You thus admit that Holiness and Righteousness have no necessary connection with each other! A good and learned man, the Curate, whose only fault was being a little wild, is turned adrift, like a servant, at the caprice of a Reverend *rascal* who cheats his creditors, and cannot be touched! And this is your boasted Church of England!" As usual, Mr. Gnatstrainer improved the opportunity in one of his *extempore* orations. He made his audience grin, by contrasting the conduct of the Curate and Rector to their respective creditors, and by a further contrast of the Rector with the Apostles! "Can you imagine St. Peter or St. Paul, living in a rectory, with £900 a-year, and yet running into debt for £2,500, and still enjoying an income of £1,000, and holding property of valuable jewels and plate, a splendid library and costly furniture, and hiding away the most precious articles in a Jewish temple, or Christian church, to elude his creditors?" The Orator wound

up by plainly hinting that the Rector's son was now living on money supplied, not by his father, but by his father-in-law ; and drew the conclusion that Dissenters must be better Christians than Churchpeople !



CHAPTER IV.

THE CURATE'S ELDER BROTHER.—A PUBLISHER'S PROFESSIONAL PROPOSAL!

THE first duty, with Mother and Son, was to pay the Curate's debts. Mrs Weatherall thought she might be able to borrow the money, or a portion of it, from her elder son, a bookseller and publisher in one of the little courts abutting on "the Row." Her errand might have been done alone, but she did not like to leave "William" by himself. Accordingly, some five weeks after "The Tournament," when her son was well enough to travel, they steamed up to London by Parliamentary train. They enquired their way to Paternoster Row. But even when arrived within these classical precincts, they wandered to and fro, and made many inquiries, before stumbling on the sequestered court in which Walter Weatherall was established. At length they arrived at the house, which was not only his place of business, but his residence. Mr. Weatherall was reputed to be a good man of business, and likely to rise in the world. He was a short, stumpy man, turned of thirty. Perhaps no two brothers differed more in appearance and character, than the Curate and the Publisher. That he was "canny,"

might be predicted from his living at his place of business, to the intense disgust of his wife, who continually harped on a West-end Villa. But the Publisher's real character will soon display itself, in the following characteristic conversation with his mother and brother. This (as it throws light on the Curate's fortunes) cannot be considered a digression.* They found the Publisher in his shop, rating his single clerk! Mr. Walter Weatherall had not seen his mother and brother for upwards of a year; but he showed neither surprise nor joy at their unexpected appearance. He received them as if they had parted but the day before.

"Hullo! here you are."

"Yes, Walter; pray excuse me for not writing to say we were coming. I thought we should surprise you——"

"Nothing that women do will surprise me. I'm married! Suppose I had been away from home. You would have had your long journey for nothing. But come in. Don't stand talking in the shop. This way. Look sharp, Saunders, and don't interrupt me, unless you really want me."

The Publisher led the way into a small private apartment; motioned his mother and brother to sit; then carefully shut the door, and said:

* It is, I hope, superfluous to state that this little book-seller is merely an individual sketch. He no more represents respectable publishers, than Sampson Brass, the pettifogger, represents the legal profession.

“That fellow Saunders attends to everybody’s business but mine, for which he’s paid. Confound the conceited, stuck-up, proud, Scotch beggar. I must discharge him for a better bargain. To give you an idea of his pride and folly, the other day he had to sign a receipt. My customer showed it to me afterwards. My clerk had written his own name Simon Saunders, *Esquire!*” *

Mrs. Weatherall was now about to enter upon her business, when her elder son saved her the trouble. “My dear Walter, you will never guess the object of my visit——”

The Publisher unceremoniously interrupted: “Oh! don’t I though? Now look here, mother, I know your errand as well as if you told me—and, not to disappoint you——”

His mother was overjoyed, thinking that he had anticipated, and would grant, her request.

“Oh, bless you, dear Walter, for that word!”

“Oh, stow that cant——”

“Well, then, dear Walter, I will only say *Thank you*, most sincerely”

“Well, if you like to thank me for nothing, of course you are welcome.”

“For nothing! Did you not say you knew my errand, and would not disappoint me?”

“Yes, but you don’t twig.”

"Twig?"

"You don't take."

"Take?"

"You are not up to me."

"Up to you?"

"I mean, you are not down upon me."

"Down upon you?"

"Hang it! You're not wide awake."

"You use such strange language, Walter."

"In plain English, you don't understand me."

"Why not say that before, then?"

"Look here; what I meant was not to hope for what you won't get. Is not your errand to try and borrow money? Of course! Why, I saw it in your face, as soon as you entered the shop!"

"Well, Walter, you London tradesmen are so clever——"

"Now, you're trying to gammon me. It won't do. And don't call me a tradesman. We are a cut above leather. Ours is called *The Trade*—to distinguish it from all others."

"I'm sure Walter, I don't want to offend you——"

"No; I believe that."

"If you would only listen to me. I needn't tell you of the awful accident at Laxington Park, five weeks since, for, of course, you must have read about it in the newspapers."

"Of course, I saw it. That's stale news now."

“Well, but the consequences to your poor dear brother are terribly serious.”

“Not so serious to him, as the consequences of his clumsiness are to Lady What’s-her-name. She’s not dead I suppose? No, I should have seen it in the papers.”

“Oh, no, Lady Forrester is recovered, but——”

“She has lost an eye, has she not?”

“Unfortunately she has. It is a painful subject. But it was not your brother’s fault. No accident would have happened, but for that wretch who threw a rocket, or some explosive or other. William was startled, as any one would be in such circumstances. In the sudden movement he made, the gun went off. I’m sure he had a spite against Lady Honoria.”

“Who—William?”

“Walter, how can you be so obtuse? Of course I mean the wretch who threw the rocket——”

“The cracker. Well, what’s all this to me?”

“You see, William has lost his curacy. And misfortunes never come single. The tradespeople have all sent in their bills at once, amounting to something over £250.”

“All run up by my pious brother, during his six month’s flirtation with Lady What’s-her-name, an Earl’s daughter! Why, that’s at the rate of £500 per annum over and above his stipend of £150; say £650 a year.

Dash it all, William, you were going it, and no mistake! You were bound to be a swell. You used to be a regular Sobersides. When a clergyman does break out, I'll back him to beat a layman hollow."

"You don't take into account all the circumstances of the case, Walter," said the Curate, speaking almost for the first time. "I had good reason to expect preferment. I saw a brilliant career before me. But since that dreadful day, the 1st of May, all my hopes are blighted. I am now a disgraced and ruined man."

"Well, if you are, I don't see how I can help you. Once more, mother, for the second time, I ask, what has all this to do with me?"

"Walter, do you really ask that question seriously?"

"Never was more serious in my life."

"Will you stand by, and see your brother ruined, obliged to become a bankrupt, or go to prison, without helping him?"

"Do you expect me to fork over £250?"

"Walter, you are so abrupt. Your brother is not a man of business."

"No, indeed."

"Well, *you* are. If these accounts were looked into, there would be some abatement made, don't you think?"

"Not a doubt of it. Perhaps twenty-five per cent. or more. But do you really expect to get £200 out of me?"

“No, Walter, I do not ask for so much ready money. But if you became surety, the tradesmen would give your brother time, and——”

“Oh yes, a likely story, to saddle myself with my brother’s debts! I have a wife and family to provide for.”

“You refuse?”

“Point blank! It can’t be done. I’ve made a resolution never to lend money to man, woman, or child.”

“Not to your Brother; not to your Mother?”

“I make no exception.”

“Very well, then poor William must rot in gaol, or be a bankrupt.”

“Rubbish! There’s no imprisonment for debt, now. As for bankruptcy, why should you object to that?”

“I regard it with loathing and horror,” said the Curate.

“Humph!” said the publisher. “I suppose *you* do. That’s a very pious sentiment, especially for a Wild Curate! But let me tell you, if you had ever been white-washed, as I have been, your loathing and horror would quickly disappear. Bankruptcy is not a bad dodge, when everything else has failed. You give up everything to your creditors. You go through the Court. You are an honest man, without a stain upon your character. And you have a nice little capital to begin business with again!”

"But that cannot be. It is a contradiction in terms. You cannot give up everything to your creditors, and still have any capital to begin the world again. I don't see it."

"No; *you* don't see it. But its done frequently, for all that!"

The Curate had spoken with the honest indignation of one who cannot conceive the existence of a knave, so far beneath a thief, as the fraudulent debtor! His elder brother regarded him, with sneering contempt, as a clever rogue presumes to despise an honest man! The Publisher thought his brother a fool. Yet how much wiser was the younger, than the elder brother! The Curate had been "wild," but he would have lost his right arm, rather than deliberately do a base action. To cheat a creditor, he regarded as far worse than theft. The man who does not think so, is a child in morality. He has yet to learn the grand truth, "All wickedness is folly."

The publisher continued:

"You call yourself disgraced and ruined. The loss of Lady What's-her-name's eye was your misfortune, not your fault."

"So I tell him," put in Mrs. Weatherall.

"Well, you owe £250. A mere nothing for a clergyman."

"It seems a great deal of money," said Mrs. Weatherall. "But, as I tell William, our Rector owes a great deal more. They say nearly £3,000."

“Well, do his debts trouble *him*?”

“I don’t wish to be uncharitable. But I must say they do not. A nice story is going about Laxington, as to the way he has bested his creditors. But I don’t want to be uncharitable. You wouldn’t believe such a story of a clergyman.”

“Would I not? Is there anything too mean for a clergyman, or a woman, to do?”

“Oh, Walter!”

“Present company always excepted. Tradespeople know the clergy are their most slippery customers. Clerical debts are the most difficult to recover. Why, a clergyman in debt, need never despair.”

“What do you mean, Walter?”

“I mean, if William really wants to pay his debts——”

“*If* I want to pay my debts! Do you mean to insult me, Walter? Or do you really think so meanly of your *brother*, as to suppose I would cheat my creditors?”

“Well, if you did, it appears you would only follow the example of your precious Rector! Why should you be so much better than other people?”

“I am not my Rector’s judge. He has behaved ill to me. And, as I cannot speak well of him, I prefer not to speak of him at all. But as regards my own liabilities, I will liquidate. Of course, I would be glad to obtain a reasonable reduction; say, twenty-five per cent. I suppose my tradesmen

allowed a margin for credit, and charged higher in proportion."

"You may swear they did."

"But rather than swindle out of their legal dues, those who trusted to my honour, I would live on bread and cheese, or on potatoes and salt."

"Very well, then. You, a clergyman, want to pay your debts. You can have no difficulty in doing so."

"What do you mean, Walter?" said Mrs. Weatherall.

"Mother, you don't know much of the world——"

"Thank you," said Mrs. Weatherall, who, like Mrs. Nickleby, piqued herself on her knowledge of the world!

"But you know a great deal more of the world, than William does. He's a mere babe. As green as grass."

The Curate was nettled at this disparagement.

"Allow me to tell you, Walter, that for the last five or six months, I have been living in fashionable society, associating on terms of equality and intimacy, with County-people, titled and untitled Aristocracy. I have seen far more of the fashionable world, than ever you did."

"I believe you, my boy! And a pretty kettle of fish you have made of your opportunities and privileges! I don't dispute the fact. You have been mixing in very high

society, living with fust-rate people, tip-top swells. Hand-in-glove with Earls and landed proprietors. And what have *they* done for you? Nothing! Where are all your grand friends now? They shun you as if you had the plague. And all for what? What have you done? Nothing wrong! You are made the scape-goat for an accident, which might have happened to anyone. Yet no one stands by you. You have been ill. You look ten years older than when I saw you last. You say you are disgraced and ruined. All your fashionable friends leave you to be persecuted for a paltry debt of £250. Your Rector owes £3,000, cheats his creditors, and flourishes. Yet even *he* turns against you, and dismisses you without a cause!"

"It's all true, every word. I prophesied it from the first," cried Mrs. Weatherall. "And now, Walter, since you so thoroughly understand your brother's situation—what do you advise?"

"Well, mother, you know there are lots of pious old women of both sexes, ready to advance money to a clergyman in difficulties, if he's not too proud to ask for it. I wouldn't be, in William's case. Let him do, as other clergymen do. If he's too proud to snap his fingers at his creditors, as your Rector does, he can cadge, can't he?"

"Cadge—do you mean beg?"

"Yes—but don't misunderstand. I don't

mean he's to turn out on the streets, with a basket, and a dog, and beg for coppers. Though money is made that way And some street-beggars have a far better right to despise genteel clerical beggars, than genteel clerical beggars have to despise street beggars! The Clerical cadger has only to advertise for funds to repair a church, or to convert the heathen, by sending out Bibles, brandy, and cannon-balls, or start a mission to the back slums. Any pretence will do. Money is sure to come in. He can cook his accounts, so as to defy detection. And if any obstinate layman writes a letter to the papers, to say the Reverend Mr. Cadger, has put the half, or the whole of the money, into his own pocket; the Rev. Cadger replies, abuses the detractor like a pickpocket, insinuates that he is a Dissenter, suspected of murder or forgery; and winds up with Christian forgiveness! Who will believe a layman against a clergyman?"

"You have such a strange, irreverent way of talking, Walter."

"If the money should not come in that way, by Cadging, a good-looking cleric like William can always throw himself away in marriage. Oh! you needn't pull a long face, mother. The last time I was at Laxington Church, I saw several young women ogling him. I thought it wrong. But I'm a worldling. I hadn't been inside a church for ten years. So, I'm no judge of morality in public

worship. I suppose it's the correct card for female saints to make love to the curate in the reading-desk ! It's an innovation. We shall get used to it, like intoning, preaching in a surplice, and other Ritualist Reforms."

The publisher seemed willing to talk on every subject, but that most interesting to his visitor.

"So, then, Walter, you will not assist us ? Poor William and I must return, and face our creditors, as best we can."

"Why *our* creditors ? You don't owe the money !"

"No ; but I shall be responsible, as far as my means will go."

"Let them sell you up, I suppose, for William's debt ?"

"Certainly."

"Will the money so obtained, clear the debt ?"

"Not half of it."

"Well, when they've taken your sticks, they will come down on poor William for the balance due. How will your sacrifice help him ?"

"We must trust in Providence."

"Trust in fiddlesticks."

"Walter, if you use such profane language, we must leave you."

To this dreadful threat, the publisher replied :

"Mother, you do talk such nonsense ! You can go back to Laxington, and snap your fingers at your son's creditors."

"Most are willing to wait. William went round to all."

"The more fool William! If any creditors offer to bounce, and threaten to put a man in possession, call in a lawyer. He will tell them plainly you are not responsible for your son's debts, and dare them to commit a trespass upon your property, or touch your goods and chattels."

"And what will become of poor, dear William?"

"Oh! he's all right. They can't touch him!"

"How?"

"How? For the best of all possible reasons. Here he is in London. Clever trick to get him away."

Here, Mother and Son exclaimed at once, at the bare idea of supposing that the Curate would abscond from his creditors!

"Why not, if he can't pay?"

The Curate indignantly exclaimed:

"I will return at once, rather than be thought guilty of such a dishonourable action."

"Look here, William. I want to talk in private to Mother. Just you go out, and take a turn in the Row. You'll find plenty to interest you in the book-shop windows. Only, as you are a good subject for a pick-pocket, you had better hand over your watch and purse to Mother before you go."

His mother seconded this request. The Curate complied.

“Now you may go, and don’t forget, we dine at two o’clock sharp. You’ll hear St. Paul’s strike the hour.”

The Curate departed.

“Now, mother, we can converse more freely. You say William saw his creditors. Most were willing to wait. But some refused. If they wait, well and good. If they don’t, there are two alternatives. The first is bankruptcy.”

“Horrible!”

“The second is for William to pocket his ridiculous Quixotic principles about *Honour*, and quietly keep out of the way, until he is able to pay.”

“William could only be induced to do that, if he could see any prospect of paying within a reasonable time.”

“He may be able to pay sooner than you think, if you will persuade him to take my advice.”

“My dear Walter, in any proposal, reasonable, right, and proper, we will be guided. But how is poor dear William to make money? He has lost his curacy, and is under a cloud besides! For though all sensible people know the injury to Lady Forrester was quite accidental, so far as *he* was concerned; yet he was engaged in an unclerical pastime, and has neglected his pastoral duties; and so, is not likely to get another appointment for some time——”

“Yes, yes, mother, I know all that. William

is a clergyman unattached. Well, perhaps that's all the better for him——”

“All the better?—his prospects blasted!”

“You talk, mother, as if the Church was everything! Old Mother Church is a doosed good profession for a fellow with interest. If a fellow can get on a bishop's blind side, or hook on to a noble family, or a bang-up Society. The Church is practically an institution to provide for the younger sons of noble families.”

“Oh, Walter. There are many poor clergymen!”

“Of course, and always will be, so long as the present system prevails. There are about 1,000 good benefices. Notoriously these are not given to the most deserving men. The Church quashes every attempt at reform, by pointing to the poverty of the inferior clergy, as representatives of the clergy in general! Thus, the dignified clergy remain undisturbed in their parsonages, rectories, and vicarages, with little to do, and plenty to get. Poor curates slave and starve! The Church trades on the poverty of the unbeneficed clergy. Just so a sturdy beggar exhibits his sores to excite compassion.” *

*“Indeed, we are led to suspect that ‘the Church, in her corporate capacity,’ looks upon the poverty of some of her members, as sturdy beggars look upon their sores—she is not seriously displeased with the naked and excoriated condition of her lower extremities, so long as it excites an ill-judged compassion for the whole body, and secures her impunity in idleness and over-feeding.” (“Church Establishments,” *Edin. Rev.* Feb. 1823. Vol. 38.)

“ Well, Walter, there may be truth in what you say. But what has this to do with William ? ”

“ Listen ; William was on the right track.”

“ Indeed he was, until Lady Honoria led him astray. God forbid I should judge anyone, especially after such a severe dispensation. But she is the cause of my poor dear boy’s ruin.”

“ I see the matter differently. Until Lady Honoria took him up, and trotted him out, William was nobody. He merely vegetated. He did not *live*.”

“ He was a model curate. I’ve heard even the Rector say so.”

“ Oh, yes, doubtless, so long as he slaved for the Rector, and did all the parish work, for a paltry stipend of £150, while the portly, port-winey Rector revelled in idleness on £1,000. William was a model curate, until he became a trifle wild ! ‘ All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy ! ’ But William plucked up a spirit, and kicked over the traces. And doosed well he played his cards for the last six months ! I had no idea it was in him. To hook on to the Earl of Laxington, and stick up to his daughter and only child ! She was a stunner. Pore thing ! She’s damaged now——”

“ Walter, for shame ! to speak of a lady of rank, like a bale of goods ! ”

“ Well, mother, I never thought more of William than during the last six months. I

always knew he had book-learning. That won't help him much. Any fool can write a book. It takes a doosed clever fellow to sell it. But I never gave William credit for so much mother-wit."

The old lady bridled, and looked pleased at this indirect compliment. Her son continued:

"Now, I suppose, all this time, while William was playing his cards, with such consummate skill, and was on the high road to fortune, you thought him going headlong to the devil——"

"Walter, such language! I did indeed think he had forsaken the narrow path for the broad road."

"Precisely! You put it more politely. We both mean the same thing. Only *I* think that William was acting like every other sensible man—lay or cleric—trying to build up his own fortune. 'There is a tide in the affairs of men, Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.' William was in the swim, and was going on swimmingly——"

"But how has it all ended?"

"That was his misfortune—not his fault"

"Of course, so far as the accident to Lady Honoria. But still I cannot acquit William of all blame. He ought not to have gone to the Tournament of Doves, far less have taken part in it."

"Perhaps you're right there. And yet, maybe, pore William couldn't help himself. I suppose he was really soft on Lady What's-

her-name? When a man is spooney on a woman, it's astonishing what a dashed fool he is. When I was courting my Nancy, she could make me as big a fool as she chose. However, I rather think I'm the leading partner in the firm now. Well, William played for a high stake, and lost. Pity they couldn't catch the varmint who threw that fizgig. That was a blasted flare-up!——

“Walter—such language!”

“Excuse me, mother, I was only quoting a well-known sentence in an unpublished novel. ‘Here is a blasted flare-up,’ said the Princess, whose girlish modesty had hitherto kept her silent.”

“Do you mean to tell me that any writer would attribute such improper language to a princess—and a modest princess too?”

“Yes; but the novel is not published.”

“And not likely to be published.”

“I’m afraid so,” said the publisher laughing. “I should have liked to bring it out. I admire the author’s pluck. But I can’t venture to run counter to popular prejudice.”

“No, indeed. Walter, you never should publish anything a lady should not read.”

“That’s all twaddle, mother. I’ll publish anything that pays. But we are wandering from the subject. I want to help William. And I don’t consider his prospects blasted, because he no longer gets a gardener’s wages for slaving for a lazy old Rector, and owes £250.”

"You put the matter so oddly, Walter. But what can you do for poor William, if you won't help him to pay his debts?"

"Well, mother, William's on the high road to fortune here. Keep him in London. He's not the only parson who has cut the church, and come up to seek his fortune in London. But where William is peculiarly fortunate, is in having an elder brother who——"

"Who flatly refuses to be responsible for his brother's debts! Is that what you mean, Walter?"

The publisher burst into a long and loud fit of laughter. He could enjoy a joke, even at his own expense.

"Well done, mother, you had me there, rather! But I have my answer."

"I never knew you without your answer."

"London is brightening you up, mother. Listen. Emerson says: 'To give a man money, is a low benefit. To help him to get money, is a high benefit!' Now I'm not going to pay William's debts. That would be a low benefit."

"On the contrary; it would be the greatest possible benefit."

"Women are not logical! But I'm going to teach him how to make money to pay his own debts."

"But how, dear Walter, how?"

"How? Why by *Literature* to be sure."

"Literature? Oh! I see. You propose to take William into partnership with you in

the publishing business. Well, that's very kind."

"No, mother, I don't propose to take as a partner, a man who has neither capital, nor professional knowledge; a man who has nothing, and who is worse than nothing; that is, owes money besides. That partnership would ruin both of us. That's not the way to help William."

"But William is learned and clever. You said he has mother-wit."

"True, mother, but he knows nothing about bookselling."

"But he knows a great deal about books. When we lived in London, William spent hours every day at old bookstalls. He bought loads of books, and all bargains."

The publisher arched his eyebrows contemptuously.

"Bargains which would sell for the price of waste-paper. No, William will never make his fortune by selling books. He may, by writing them. His book-learning may help him there. For—as I say—any fool can write a book. It takes a doosed clever fellow to sell it."

Mrs. Weatherall's countenance fell.

"So this is your fine scheme. You propose that William shall turn author?"

"I do."

"The worst paid, poorest, most beggarly of professions."

"Not for those who fall on their feet, and

go the right way to work. This is what I propose. William stops in London, writes, and keeps out of the way of his creditors. Thus, he kills two birds with one stone. He shall board and lodge with me."

"You are very kind, Walter, but I'm sure William will insist on paying for his maintenance and lodging."

"Oh, well, we won't quarrel about that. His creditors won't find him here. At least, if they should look him up, he won't be at home. Of course, he must leave off his clerical toggery, his M.B. coat, and white choker, and try and break himself of his clerical tricks, and cant——"

"Cant!"

"Oh bother! I mean clerical patter, gab, goody-goody talk. In short, he must cut the Parson altogether. He'll be glad to do that. He won't find it difficult, after his education in the fashionable world. It would do him good to take his clothes away altogether, and lock him up in his room with pen, ink, and paper."

"Oh! now you're joking. Poor, dear William must go out for his daily exercise. He has been used to take a great deal of exercise."

"Rather too much in the hunting-field. Eh! Never fear, mother. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. I'm not so green as to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs."

"Well, we'll see what William thinks of the proposal. I doubt if it will suit him. Much depends, of course, on what you want him to write. I suppose you'll set him to work on sermons."

"*Sermons!*" echoed the publisher, in genuine astonishment. "Do you take me for a fool?"

"Why not sermons, Walter? William is considered a most eloquent preacher. He is equally clever in *extempore*, and written sermons. Some prefer one kind; some the other. He tried to please both. I have hundreds of his sermons, all most legibly written, almost as easy to read as print."

"Keep them, mother, till I ask you for them. No, no; William must write something very different from sermons, or he won't do for me."

"I suppose you prefer essays, biography, travels?"

"No, I don't. I prefer Novels."

"*Novels!* A clergyman write novels!"

"Why not? One of our most popular novelists is a clergyman—Kingsley. Sterne, the author of '*Tristram Shandy*,' was a clergyman. Many parsons write stories, tales, and novels."

"But how could William write a novel?"

"How? With pen, ink, and paper, of course."

"I mean, how could he sit down and com-

pose a work so totally foreign to his education, thoughts, and mode of life?"

"Very easily. He's just the man to succeed. Has he not been in training for writing a novel, by living in the fashionable world? He's seen the Nobs at home! What an advantage that gives him over Snobs, who never spoke to a woman of fashion, and never saw one, except in the Park, or at the Opera. Yet these Snobs describe fashionable life, as they get it, at secondhand, from butlers, footmen, and ladies' maids. I call 'em the Area-sneak school of Fiction! Let William draw on his own experience for the past six months. He's been living like a fighting-cock, hunting with a beautiful young lady of rank; hob-nobbing with Earls, lords, and County swells. Let him strike while the iron's hot. Let him make himself the hero, and Lady What's-her-name the heroine. It is sure to take. Lor', mother, suppose William's novel made a hit? Why, we'd clear off the paltry debt in a jiffey, and advertise another work, by the same hand."

The enthusiasm of literary speculation is very contagious. Mrs. Weatherall could not help being, to some extent, influenced by her elder son's sanguine expectations. Nevertheless, the good lady prided herself on being a woman of the world! She thought it best to assume a prudent business-like manner, and said:

“Walter, I very much fear you overrate William’s capacity.”

“No, I don’t. He’s got the right stuff in him. See what he’s done! A hard-working curate settled down in Sleepy Hollow——”

“You’ve a bad memory for names, Walter. You mean Laxington.”

The publisher smiled, and continued: “A Curate who, after hiding his light under a bushel for three years——”

“He did not, Walter. Your brother was a burning and a shining light—I might almost say the only spiritual light in Laxington, until he was led astray by the world——”

“The flesh, and the devil! Eh, mother, is that what you mean?”

“Oh! Walter, you should not put such words into my mouth.”

“Serves you right for interrupting me. I say, a Curate who can cast his slough, turn from a grub to a butterfly; ride to hounds without coming to grief, hold his own in Society, and perhaps cut out rivals——”

“And a pretty name he earned in Laxington. He was called ‘*The Wild Curate.*’”

“Well, a man who can do such things, and earn such a name, can write a slap-up fashionable novel, if he tries. Let him only put his heart into it. Never fear. And—happy thought—when the novel is written we’ll call it ‘*The Wild Curate.*’ Couldn’t have a better name, or a more taking title. I only hope it won’t be anticipated. But I can

easily prevent that, by announcing the forthcoming novel under that title.'

"You do go so fast, Walter."

"Why, yes," said the publisher, rubbing his hands, "I am considered rather energetic in the Trade."

"By overrating William, I referred not to *mental*, but to *moral* capacity. William may have the talent, but not the will, to write a novel."

"Needs must, when somebody drives. *Necessitas non habet Legem*, as William would say. There's Latin for you."

"You don't yet understand. William has not the heart to turn his own sufferings into a story."

"I twig. You mean, he really loved Lady What's-her-name?"

"Of course he did."

"What! It was something more than a good spec, to get a fashionable wife, a noble father-in-law, and a leg-up for a Deanery, or perhaps a Bishoprick."

"Oh, Walter, you do not understand your brother. William loved her to distraction. He dotes on her still. He was not actuated by worldly considerations."

"Oh, no; of course not! As a clergyman, of course, he couldn't be! The clergy never are!"

"You may sneer, but it is the fact. Lady Forrester, though an only child, is no heiress. Title and Estate pass to a male heir. Lady

Honoraria will only get £200 per annum when her father dies."

"But there was the connexion. Son-in-law to an Earl. Clerics connected with nobility, even when fools, or knaves, always get preferment in our *reformed* church! In the *corrupt* Roman Catholic Church, they were hid away in monasteries, where they could do no harm, if they did no good! *We* leave plebeian worth and learning to drudge and starve in obscurity, and give Noble Noodles the cure of souls! William, as an Earl's son-in-law, would have done credit to a fat benefice. But I suppose all that's past praying for, now?"

"Quite at an end"

"Then, there's the more reason why he should turn his fashionable experience to account. You say he really loved the lady?"

"He did—and does love her still."

"Any hope of a reconciliation?"

"None! He has sent more than one letter. All have been returned unopened."

"Dashed shabby! Bulwer says: 'Well-bred people never cut one another.' Well, now he can relieve his feelings. He can write what he likes, with a clear conscience. They have thrown him over without cause."

"Certainly! William only took part in the Tournament, to oblige Lady Honoraria."

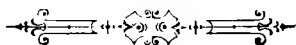
"Well, their rudeness has cancelled all obligations conferred by hospitality. It's a

pity so much good love should be wasted. Let him go to work with a will, and show up her and the Earl."

"It's not in William's nature to do anything of the kind. I fear he's heart-broken."

"Rubbish. Change of scene and occupation will soon bring him all right. Leave him to me. I'll talk him round, after dinner, over a bottle of wine. Oh, here comes William."

The entrance of the younger brother put an end to this curious dialogue.



CHAPTER V.

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY—IN THE TOILS !

It seems superfluous to state, that the Curate emphatically repudiated the Publisher's professional proposal. In vain did the elder brother use all his guile, to persuade the Curate to convert his wounded affections into current coin of the realm. In vain did the publisher point out that, just in proportion to the poignancy of the recent trial, would be the freshness and vigour of the description, and analysis of feeling. In vain did he urge that the Curate would conquer his trouble, by the mental effort required to methodize, and put it on paper. The Curate was proof against all his brother's arts, his wiles and his wine ; his wheedling and his bounce ! The Curate at length waxed indignant at the idea that he would photograph and expose to public gaze, all the secret happiness of the past few months. When reminded that past obligations had been cancelled by present injustice and rudeness, he found excuses for the woman he still idolised. He felt and acted in the spirit of Shakespeare's Sonnet :

“ Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove : ”

“And were it even so—that I could ever cease to love her—I, as a Christian minister, should freely forgive, and not condescend to so base a revenge. Never by a spoken, much less by a written, word, will I attempt to injure the dearest of women.”

This should have been enough, had the elder brother been a man of fine feelings. But the Curate spoke a language which the Publisher did not understand. When the persevering publisher found that he had failed, he said with a sneer :

“Very well. Bring yourself out. Try writing for magazines. That may divert your mind. But it won’t pay your debts. A good fashionable novel might have done that. Magazines are the graves of talent. For one reader of a dry Essay, there are a thousand readers of a Novel.”

But no persuasion could induce the publisher to alter his determination, not to be, in any way, responsible for his brother’s debts. The elder brother had now a plausible excuse for his refusal. He said he had proposed a plan which would certainly have succeeded! That plan was scouted. He now washed his hands of all responsibility, with a clear conscience. If William liked to go back to Laxington, and face his creditors, the more fool he! Probably, the publisher still cherished the hope, that the Curate might yet be induced to alter his determination, and embalm his most pathetic emotions in a

three-volume novel. The wish was doubtless father to the thought, that further experience of duns might bring about this consummation.

The Curate resolved to go back to Laxington. He was shocked at the possibility that he could be suspected of absconding. Mother and son returned to Laxington. A very unpleasant surprise awaited them. They had not been away four days. Yet in that brief period, several dunning letters had been sent. All demanded money, more or less peremptorily. Some even hinted that the Curate had absconded! What particularly distressed the Curate was, that some of these letters came from creditors who had promised to wait for their money. There was something in this apparently inconsistent conduct, that he could not understand. It looked as if an enemy had been at work, tampering with his creditors, and sowing the tares of distrust, where he had left the golden grain of confidence. He had his labour to begin all over again. He fondly hoped that his reappearance in the High Street of Laxington, would be quite sufficient to check the malicious rumour that he had absconded. It was not so. More letters were received, containing urgent, and even insolent, demands for money due. Once more the Curate called upon these obdurate creditors. But he was not successful, as before. He found them distant, civil, sneering, or rude. But one and all united in refusing further delay. That

they should be thus unanimous in refusing reasonable time to an honest man, who had no intention of levanting, was quite inexplicable to the Curate. Among his creditors were several Church-people. They had listened to his sermons. To some he had administered private spiritual comfort. To his great distress, these seemed the bitterest of all. They said they would not have given him credit, had they not trusted to his Cloth! The Rector's treatment of his creditors showed how little dependence was to be placed on Clerical debtors! The Curate might meditate a similar "dodge." That it was mean, if not dishonest, to run up debts, without a prospect of payment!

"But I have a prospect of payment, if you will only give me reasonable time, as you promised, not a fortnight since. Let me pay by instalments. If you all press me at once, for immediate payment, you will force me to become a bankrupt. I will give up all I am worth. And then you will not get five shillings in the pound. Then, I shall get the reputation of swindling my creditors — *I* — who sincerely desire, and intend, to pay twenty shillings in the pound."

To this most reasonable request, there could be no logical refusal. But the same creditors who a short time previously had agreed to wait, now sullenly replied: They would see to that! They wanted their money! They would have their money! How did they know

what might happen? the Curate had gone away!

“But,” he indignantly interrupted, “you see I have returned. Do you want a better proof that I never entertained the base thought of absconding?”

The reply was to this effect: Who knows? He might go away again, and not return. Or, he might remain in Laxington, and still swindle his creditors, as the Rector had done! In short, if the Curate refused to pay, he should be made to pay!

The Curate was the worst business-man in the world. Or, he would have taken his brother's advice; turned round on these obdurate creditors, and dared them to do their worst. He was living with his mother. The house was rented in her name. The furniture belonged to her. Legally, they could not distrain on her property, to obtain payment of her son's debts. To forge a legal claim, some creditor must deliberately perjure himself; that is, swear that the debt for which he sued, had been incurred by the Mother. And though some might have ventured so far as this, the false oath would have been met by the true declaration of mother and son, to the contrary. But the Curate did not consider these things. A half heart-broken man is not careful to stand up for his rights. Yet his fine delicate sense of honour helped to make the Curate feel keenly these gross insults from tradesmen. They rendered him thoroughly

wretched. He asked himself why his creditors had no pity, no mercy? Why they all conspired, as it were, to crush him to the earth? He puzzled over the problem in vain. He could not solve the mystery, The poor Curate could not know—his guileless nature did not permit him to suspect—that he had a relentless enemy! This fiend in human shape, had made it a special business to communicate with all the creditors, and implant distrust, by insinuations that the Reverend Mr. Weatherall was perfectly solvent, but (like the Rector) did not intend to pay his debts. That the demand for time, was simply a blind, to allow the Curate to slip away quietly, out of reach of his creditors. It is superfluous to say that this mischief was not wrought *in propria personâ*. For then, the libeller could have been traced and punished. It was done by that convenient instrument of malignant cowards—the *anonymous letter*!

At this critical period of his affairs, the depression of the Curate's spirits caused his Mother serious apprehensions of a relapse in his health. The longest day came and went. The beautiful summer weather had no attractions for the Curate. The grand old trees of Laxington Park, exhibited the luxuriant foliage of "leafy June." But the Curate never entered its sequestered glades. There, he had once wandered and mused alone, like "the melancholy Jacques." There, he had known his greatest happiness, walking with

Lady Honoria. That beautiful park was now forbidden ground to the Curate. Legally, he had the same right as others, to pass along its thoroughfares. Morally, since May-day, he had been expelled, as Adam and Eve were exiled from Paradise. In vain, his mother urged him to take out-door exercise. He moped in the house during the day. He only went forth with owls and bats, in the evening. The monotony of his life was broken by an unexpected visit. One day, there was a fashionable knock. The servant announced Mr. Blackadder! Remembering the narrow escape narrated in Book III., Chapter V., it may appear odd that Blackadder should call; and more odd that the Curate would consent to see him. But a reference to that incident will show, that the Curate did not share in Lady Honoria's confident conviction, that the would-be murderer of that evening, was Blackadder. The Curate thought that Lady Honoria did the Secretary injustice. And her recent cruel injustice to the Curate, was certainly calculated to strengthen that belief.

"What can *he* want with me?" said the Curate.

"Don't see him, William. I'm sure he means to do you some mischief."

"'Judge not, that ye be not judged.' Perhaps he may stand in need of spiritual comfort. He has lost his situation. I have lost mine. He doubtless wants sympathy."

“More likely, he wants to borrow money.”

“There, I can be firm, for the best of reasons. I have none to lend.”

“If you do see him, be on your guard against him.”

The Curate entered the drawing-room, where the visitor was waiting. Mr. Blackadder stood up, advanced, and extended his hand. The Curate had not the presence of mind, to refuse the proffered hand.

“I must apologise for this visit, Mr. Weatherall. I fear you consider me an intruder?”

The Curate’s courtesy could not carry him so far as a complimentary contradiction. “Be good enough to state your business, sir.”

“Do you consider me an enemy, Mr. Weatherall?”

“I know no reason why you should be. I am sure I never gave you cause. I never wilfully injured you.”

“Never wilfully, I grant. But can you not imagine you may have injured me in a very tender point?”

The Curate’s wan cheeks were tinged by an eloquent blush.

Blackadder continued: “I see you apprehend me. But I will speak plainly, in confidence between two gentlemen. I have long known *your* secret, Reverend sir. Have you never guessed *mine*? Possibly, and probably, the favourite admirer of Lady Honoria—

—Forrester, has not bestowed a thought on a rival so humble, so obscure, as the private Secretary—now the *ex-private* Secretary—of her father. Or perhaps, you may have thought that what was pardonable in the *Curate*, would be downright presumption in the *Secretary!*”

“I have thought nothing at all about it. May I ask why you introduce this delicate and painful subject?”

“I will explain my motives. But firstly, I must confess my own weakness.”

“I have no desire to pry into your private affairs.”

“No, I know you are not my father confessor. You don’t belong to the Ritualist Church of England, whose priests have revived Roman Catholic discipline for the *Laity*, while carefully dispensing with it for *themselves!*”

“Will you come to the point, Mr. Blackadder?”

“I will. But, as the proverb says ‘Open confession is good for the soul,’ it is absolutely essential that I tell you this, first. Yes, I did venture to raise my plebeian eyes to the beautiful aristocratic Lady Honoria! To this extent only, you and I were rivals. But I might have known my case was hopeless. I am three or four years your senior. In point of fortune we are about equal. But you have a Social status derived from your sacred profession. I have no social position whatever.

So, when, in a moment of rashness, I forgot my situation so far, as to hint to Lady Honoria the state of my affections, you may guess the sort of answer I received."

No need of that piercing glance, to discover the Curate's attention and curiosity fully roused!

Mr. Blackadder continued: "Even if I wished to excite your jealousy, it is out of my power to do so. Truth compels me to relate that I never received any encouragement, either by look, or word, from Lady Honoria. Had she lost her temper, I could have borne it better. But the cold, cutting sarcasm, the high-bred hauteur of the patrician dame, was all but intolerable. She repulsed me, as though I had been a menial. What do you think she said to me? Shall I tell you, if I do not bore you?"

"If you please."

"The high and well-born lady, either did think, or affected to think, that I had been drinking! She said coolly: 'Mr. Blackadder, the only excuse I can suppose for you, is that you are not quite yourself! If I thought you, at this moment, perfectly sober, you should leave Laxington House at once.' I was so taken aback, by the fine lady's insolence, that instead of braving it out, as I should have done, I caved in, as that amusing Yankee, Mr. Spry, would say. I murmured out something about hoping I had not offended her. She looked at me, as if I

were some unclean reptile, and said: ‘I consent to excuse your indiscretion, but on this sole condition, that, whether you remain in the Earl’s service days, or years, you never presume to address me again. Remember, if you ever forget yourself, so far as to do so, you go at once.’ I gave the promise, and she dismissed me with a disdainful motion of her jewelled hand, as a Roman Empress might have dismissed a household slave, not yet to be thrown to the lampreys!”

“May I ask why you tell me this?”

“I am coming to that, Reverend sir, if you will be patient. If I had ever been so foolish as to be jealous of the *entente cordiale* between you, and Lady Honoria, I should have been most unreasonable. For I had already received my *congé*, or in Yankee English, ‘got the sack’;—received my dismissal, before you appeared on the scene.”

“I quite understand that. Still I cannot guess your motive, in giving me your confidence.”

“My object is briefly this. To let you know that I can, from experience, sympathise with one suffering from the pangs of unrequited love. Perhaps you may say—you want not my sympathy. Be it so. I have at least removed any possible misconception on your part. You cannot now think that I regard you with the jealous feelings of a rival. You have not injured me in any way with Lady Honoria. She told me plainly she

would none of me ; in fact, grossly insulted me, before she ever knew you. I have fancied sometimes that you regarded me askance, as if you thought I laboured under the delusion that you had in some way supplanted me. Now, I wished to remove this misconception. Having done so, permit me to take my leave."

Mr. Blackadder rose, as if about to go, but did not ! He lingered, as if to receive some expression of opinion from the Curate. The latter said :

"Mr. Blackadder, I will be frank with you."

"Thank you," said Blackadder unctuously.

"I did think that, for some reason or other, you regarded me with an evil eye."

"I thought so. But you now see your mistake. Whether you, or any one else monopolised Lady Honoria's favour, mattered not in the least to me. *I* was completely out of court."

"I thank you, sir, for your frankness in removing my misconception."

"You are heartily welcome. And now, I shall take my leave—that is," he added, as if the idea had suddenly occurred, "unless, I can be of any further use. I know your secret, Mr. Weatherall. I know how greatly you have suffered. Let me assure you of my deep—my heartfelt sympathy. You are peculiarly unfortunate. The cup of happiness has been, as it were, dashed from your

very lips. Every one entertained the idea that Lady Honoria favoured you: that you were *facile princeps*. Suddenly, by an accident for which you were in no way to blame, the act of some thoughtless lad—I cannot think so badly of human nature, as to suppose that the cracker was thrown intentionally, to make you wound Lady Honoria—suddenly, I say, you lost what was dearer than life—the love of a pure, beautiful, and high-souled woman—but cheer up, Reverend sir; *Nil desperandum*. ‘The blackest cloud, a silver lining wears.’ The darkest hour is just before the dawn. When things are at the worst—they mend. *Do not despair.*”

This cunning confidence was well calculated to impose even on a more suspicious person, than the Curate. It at once completely confirmed his conviction, that his intended murderer could not have been Blackadder! For it had suited the ex-Secretary to tell the exact truth, as to his relations with Lady Honoria. The facts were as related. So that, even admitting Blackadder had some excuse, for hating a woman who had humiliated him; he had no motive whatever to hate the Curate. He fell into a very natural error. Inability to gauge the capacity of malignant Envy to hate without cause! Blackadder had told the truth. Then, he had no motive to hate the Curate. The latter jumped to the erroneous conclusion, that Blackadder did not hate him!

Good people thus continually deceive themselves, respecting the bad. Naturally, the Curate went further. He was persuaded that Lady Honoria had grossly wronged the Secretary, in thinking him guilty of attempting murder. Probably then, Blackadder was wronged in other respects. Like all generous natures, the Curate was inclined to do the suspected person more than justice. The Curate would have been more, or less than man, had he not been touched by the artful hypocrite's display of sympathy, concluding with the gipsy's encouraging words:—"Do not despair!" The Curate thanked his supposed comforter, with effusion. Blackadder saw his object attained. He had completely disarmed suspicion. He forthwith proceeded, as he would have said, "to twist the Curate round his finger."

"Believe me, I have no wish to intrude on your grief. That would be a heartless act. But if I could do you any good, then I should act like a skilful surgeon probing a wound, to remove the bullet. He agonises the patient—to save his life!"

The unsuspecting victim replied: "Thank you, Mr. Blackadder. I am deeply grateful for your sympathy. But it is not in your power to help me."

"Do not be too sure of that. Do not think my offers of help, mere idle compliments. I could not live so long in Laxington House, without ample opportunities of studying Lady

Honoriam's character. Pardon me if I say, I know it better than you do—if you conclude, as I imagine you do—that all is over between you and her ladyship.”

The Curate's glance seemed to say ; “ Oh ! if you could but assure me of that ! ”

Blackadder continued : “ Your affairs are not desperate. Why should you not hope everything from Time ? ”

“ I have tried to console myself with that idea. But in vain. Lady Honoriam is hopelessly alienated. She associates me with that awful accident of the 1st of May.”

“ Have you not written to explain ? ”

“ Several letters. All have been returned, unopened.”

“ That is unhandsome. Hardly consistent with good breeding. But it may be the Earl's doing. Lady Honoriam may not be responsible for such rudeness.”

“ If I could think *that* ? ”

“ Why not ? Hope for the best.”

“ Meantime, Lady Honoriam's mind is poisoned against me. She will shortly leave Laxington — forget me altogether, or remember me only with detestation.”

“ That is the danger. What you require, is a personal interview. Then, you might remove this painful misconception on her part, that you are to blame for the loss of her eye.”

“ Oh ! she should be welcome to my heart's blood, if it could restore the sight of her eye.”

"See, and tell her that. Even if it did not soften her heart, she would at least learn the truth. That you are as innocent of causing the loss of her eye, as—*I myself!*"

"Oh! Mr. Blackadder, if all did me the same justice! Who would not be startled by being suddenly struck by an explosive missile? For a moment, I believed myself wounded. The movement I made, was mechanical. The gun was on full cock, and discharged itself."

"It might have happened to the most experienced marksman—to Captain Rasper himself! No possible reproach can accrue to you. I saw it all——"

"What! were you present?"

Blackadder, in great confusion, replied: "No!—I was not present."

"But you said you *saw* it all."

"Excuse me, sir. I said, or I certainly meant to say, I *see* it all. That is, I quite understand your explanation. You bring the whole scene vividly before my mind's eye. You comprehend me now?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Not being privileged to be among the Earl's guests, you cannot think I would demean myself, by mixing with yokels and other tag-rag and bob-tail, outside the grounds?"

"Certainly not."

"Did you see the person who threw the cracker?"

"I saw nobody. Or, if I did, I was too

excited to note, or remember him. I have heard it was some one in a smock-frock."

"A very vague description. Probably some thoughtless, farm-yard lout played a practical joke, without any idea of the mischief it might cause."

"That is my idea."

"He is now, of course, afraid to own it."

"Exactly."

"If then, you could but see Lady Honoria, for a brief period, alone, you might be able to convince her of your complete innocence. She might see her injustice in holding you responsible."

"I could but try. But how to see her? It would be useless to call. I should not be admitted. Even if I could face the servants, I should probably be treated with insult and ignominy. They all love Lady Honoria, and are, of course, proportionally bitter against me."

Blackadder seemed to ponder for a while, and then said: "True; but why should you not meet Lady Honoria? She takes carriage exercise. Though I believe she has not ventured on horseback, since her sad accident. A serious deprivation to a lady so fond of riding. As for *hunting*, that, I presume, is now quite out of the question." Blackadder continued, apparently unconscious of the agony his words inflicted on the Curate: "After all, *walking* is the safest. Though such a splendid horsewoman as Lady Honoria *was*,

naturally disdains such plebeian exercise. Yet she sometimes walks in the park."

"I have never set foot in the park, since the day of the accident."

"The right of way is public, as free to you and me, as to the Earl himself."

"I know it. But somehow, I cannot bear the thought of meeting him, especially in his own park——"

"*His* own Park! He has only a life interest, and *that* he grossly abuses. Can he prevent the foreclosure of mortgages with which he has illegally burdened the land? Can he refund the cost of the valuable timber he has felled? Can he make good the damages he has done to the interests of the heir-at-law—his own nephew? The Earl can do nothing of the kind. Legally, he has no more right to that Park, which he calls his own, than you or I! It is wonderful that Mr. Forrester bears it so patiently. But perhaps I know the reason of that also."

The wily ex-Secretary threw out this hint of his secretly acquired knowledge, as a feeler. Had the Curate courted Lady Honoria, for her rank and fortune, he would have been curious to learn all particulars respecting the Earl's affairs. No one could have given more correct information, or would have been more willing to impart it, than Mr. Blackadder—"for a consideration!"

But the Curate was perfectly disinterested in his attachment. He therefore rather re-

sented the idea, that he would listen to the Earl's secret history, and said drily :

"I am not in the least interested in these details, which I imagine you acquired in your capacity of private Secretary to the Earl."

"Oh! I thought you might have some interest in learning the exact pecuniary value of Lady Honoria. How do you think the Earl has provided for his only child, who might be left at any moment, without a protector? Lady Honoria will be no better off at her father's death than she is now. She has exactly £200 *per annum*, in her own right, left her by her mother. I don't think the Earl can deprive her of *that*. And I will do him the justice to say, I don't think he ever tried to borrow money of *her*!"

"I have already said, sir, that I have no curiosity to learn these monetary matters," replied the Curate, emphatically.

Mr. Blackadder had now got his cue.

"I am rejoiced, Reverend sir, to hear you say so. Your pure disinterestedness does you infinite credit. I hear that our exemplary Rector (who sets you such a good example, as to hunting, and living within his income) has actually dismissed you from your curacy, for no reason whatever, but to curry favour with the Earl. The Rector's conduct is natural, and perfectly consistent with his character. He is no more a Christian than—Mr. Holy-oake!"

"Sir, I desire to hear no disparagement

of my former Rector. He naturally feels grateful to the Earl, who gave him the living——”

“ Begging your pardon, Mr. Weatherall, I know the Rector better than you do. He is not the man to feel gratitude, except as a lively sense of favours to come ! Everybody knows the Rector wanted to get the reversion of the living for his son. He is a dissipated young Oxonian, a Radical, a Republican in politics ; a Nothingarian in religion, a free-liver and a freethinker. No uncommon character at that Orthodox University ! His father has quarrelled with him for marrying old Gnat strainer’s daughter. But if the young fellow has finished sowing his wild oats, he may qualify for the living. If he does get it, I wish Laxington joy. The parishioners will be as fortunate in their new, as in their old, Rector. Old Headlong is hardly ever sober. I’ve seen him in Church so drunk, he could hardly read the service ! ”

“ Mr. Blackadder, all this is very distasteful to me.”

“ I rejoice to hear it, Reverend sir. You are as magnanimous, as you are disinterested in your affection. You love a woman of rank, who has but a paltry stipend ; who has lost an eye, and treats you most unjustly. An ordinary lover would repay her aversion with compound interest, and cease to sigh for one no longer considered beautiful. You forgive a proud priest of the Hophni and Phinehas

school, a Pharisee who has—pardon the homely phrase—kicked you, when you were down. You are a true Christian. I believe in you. I honour you. Ah, sir! if there were more men like you in the Church, the Laity would respect and love the Clergy, instead of regarding your Order with contemptuous toleration, or ill-concealed aversion!”

The bitter and sweet were so artfully compounded in this bolus; the words were uttered in such a hearty fashion, that the Curate could not take offence. Blackadder was an adept in the difficult art of Flattery, practised by all, but in which so few excel. He had studied to some purpose “The Sentimental Journey.” Yorick’s secret, learned from the gentlemanly man of fifty-two (who only begged from ladies, and never unsuccessfully), was duly reduced to practice by Blackadder!

The Curate was too simple and straightforward, to be beyond Flattery. We all like it, providing it be skilfully administered. When we detect the deceit, we are indignant at the insult to our understandings. And why do we all love Flattery, while proclaiming it detestable? For one reason. It is pleasanter to be called a gentleman, than a blackguard; a wise man, than a fool. We all see ourselves more favourably, than we appear to others. Hence, we are gratified, when the opinion of the world seems to coincide with our own. No one likes to discover that he is living in a fool’s paradise. To gain some secret end, or

from pure good nature, the Flatterer spares our self-love. The surly independent truth-teller wounds our feelings. The Flatterer is not always a designing villain. The human Bear is very often not what he affects to be, our very best friend, who tells us our faults out of pure interest in us. He is far more often, an "Apemantus" finding malicious pleasure in telling unpleasant truths. His object is not really to do good, but to please his own sardonic humour, by hurting his victim. The same kind of pleasure is felt by Sportsmen in wounding, and killing sensitive creatures. It is a marked indication of the innate wickedness of our fallen and corrupt nature!

Seeing that the Curate swallowed the bait, and implicitly believed in him, Blackadder continued: "If you really wish a personal interview with Lady Honoria, I can bring it about."

"How?" asked the Curate eagerly.

"I must begin with another proof of my confidence, to convince you that I sincerely wish you success in your suit with Lady Honoria. You must know then that I have been for some time married—I mean engaged to be married, to Miss Minckes, Companion to her ladyship. A man is never more likely to fall suddenly in love with a woman, than after being scorned by another woman. The natural love of sympathy, I suppose, joined to what Byron calls 'the strong Necessity of loving,' and perhaps, a little spice of revenge

—(proof of what you parsons call our corrupt nature), the desire to show the scorner, that the scorned one need not go a-begging for love; can find some one to take compassion, and is not quite prostrated by his disappointment from dear Lady Disdain.”

“I wish you joy, Mr. Blackadder. I suppose you will soon be putting up the banns?”

“Not for some time, I fear. We must be prudent. I have recently lost my situation. Miss Minckes has only her stipend as Companion. We must wait till we see our way to commence housekeeping.”

“You are quite right not to marry rashly. But when you do see your way—which I hope, will be soon—I would gladly officiate gratuitously, to show my sense of your kindness.

“Thanks, Mr. Weatherall. I will bear your kind offer in mind. Well, I often meet my betrothed in the park. And in our walks and talks, she tells me a good deal about Lady Honoria. That is how I come to be so well informed.”

“And how is she? How is Lady Honoria? How does she bear up? Are her health and spirits good?”

“Well, on the whole, Miss Minckes’s report is favourable. I presume you know that the sight of the left eye is quite lost.”

“Yes, I know that” said the Curate mournfully.

“Fortunately, the right eye is not in the least injured.”

“Thank God for that.”

“The injured eye is concealed by a black velvet shade. When you see Lady Honoria’s right profile, she looks as beautiful as ever. But Lady Honoria cannot look in a mirror, without seeing how much she is disfigured. This of course preys on her mind. She declines all invitations; refuses to go into Society; is not at home to visitors. She sits alone, and reads. Now I come to what will interest you particularly. Every fine day, Lady Honoria spends some hours alone on a rustic seat, built for her convenience, almost on the very spot where you accidentally shot her. Strange fancy, is it not? One would imagine the spot hateful by its associations. That she would avoid it. Yet she haunts the place—the grave, as it were, of her matchless beauty—as bereaved mourners revisit the graves of their beloved ones. She sits there, and muses, and nurses her sorrow. Pardon me, Reverend Sir. I fear I have distressed you.”

The Curate had covered his face with his hands. When the paroxysm of grief had exhausted itself, Blackadder said:—“You understand my object in entering into these particulars? What is to hinder you from walking through the park, and meeting Lady Honoria, as if accidentally.”

“If I dared?—If you think it not too soon? If—but no—I feel it would be worse

than useless. She would regard me as an intruder. Perhaps, order her menials to drive me from her grounds."

"I have already said they cannot turn you off the thoroughfares. But why should you take so despondent a view? Lady Honoria is very lonely. Perhaps the sight of you, may soften her. And where could you better explain your blamelessness, than on the scene of the accident?"

"True; but yet——"

"Risk all! If Lady Honoria should forgive you, it is not all over. You never can be entire strangers. Pardon what I am about to say. But has it never occurred to you, that Lady Honoria's matrimonial prospects are now almost *nil*? It is very doubtful if she marry her cousin. She had a host of admirers, sighing and dying lovers, writing sonnets, or getting them written, and signing what they paid for. They will now leave her severely alone. I question if any one now really wishes to marry Lady Honoria, but you. You have—pardon the homely expression—unintentionally marked her for your own. She does then, in some sense, belong to you. Pray excuse, my plain speaking."

The Curate gazed with dilated eyes. The newly-aroused hope made him oblivious of the coarseness of Blackadder's language, and of the Mephistophelian irony, which lurked beneath!

"You really think this, Mr. Blackadder?"

“Most undoubtedly.”

“You really think Lady Honoria might forgive me?”

“If you personally explained, and asked her, I think she would do much more than forgive. Lady Honoria would probably renew what I presume, was an engagement. She will take you on again. I know the Sex better than you do. Try, and prove my words true.”

The Curate pressed his deliberate deceiver's hand, and exclaimed: “Mr. Blackadder, if you are sincere, you are my good angel. If you deceive me——”

“If I deceive you! Sir, I must excuse you. You are a very poor judge of human nature. What possible motive have I for deceiving you? You never injured me. Why should I injure you?”

To the Curate's unsuspecting nature, this logic seemed sound. He could not plumb his visitor's black heart, or comprehend the existence of one who finds actual pleasure in doing evil! The Fly was helplessly entangled in the Spider's toils.

“True, true; why should you? You have no possible motive. Pardon my suspicions. My trouble has severely shaken me. My mind is not so strong as it was.”

“I freely forgive your suspicions for that reason. Your sufferings have indeed been great. The man who could take advantage of your heavy trouble, of your guileless unsus-

pecting nature, must have indeed a bad heart ! Could I believe there existed such a fiend in human shape, I should certainly credit the doctrine of natural depravity."

The Curate made a hasty mental memorandum to the effect, that Mr. Blackadder was a good worthy soul, but like too many of the Laity, not exactly Orthodox ; and resolved to take a future opportunity to convert him to belief in natural depravity !

"About what time of day does Lady Honoria visit the spot near the ha-ha?"

"Well thought of ! She is extremely regular. Almost always from three to five in the afternoon."

"Do you think she will be there to-morrow?"

"Most probably, unless it should rain. And that is unlikely. This beautiful July weather will tempt her out. But as a friend, I recommend you not to postpone the trial. For no one can tell how long her ladyship may continue to give you the opportunity of meeting her there."

"I will come to-morrow. It will kill me to live in suspense. At least I will know the worst, without delay."

There was a strange light in Blackadder's eyes, as he replied :

"Good ! I wish you every success. So far as lies in my power, I will endeavour to prepare her ladyship for the interview. I mean of course, by influencing her ladyship in

your favour, through Miss Minckes. One word more. Better delay your arrival till nearly *four* o'clock. There will be the less risk of missing Lady Honoria, *or* of meeting her in the park, where your *tête-à-tête* might be interrupted. And in that case, Lady Honoria might avoid you for the future."

"I will follow your advice implicitly, and be there, at four to-morrow afternoon."

Blackadder had perorated, with a sentiment worthy of Joseph Surface. After affectionately wringing the Curate's hand, the traitor departed. He had succeeded so far in his sinister purpose, beyond his most sanguine expectations. He now anticipated the execution of the most diabolical scheme of vengeance ever devised by the unregenerated human heart !



CHAPTER VI.

MISCHIEF BREWING!—AN ORIGINAL REVENGE!—
A SINGULAR TRIUMPH!

THE following morning, about eleven, Mr. Blackadder, as usual, met Miss Minckes in the park. They strolled on till they came to the lake. Winding along the margin, they came to a spot where the bank hung precipitously over very deep water. Here, Blackadder stopped abruptly, and peered down into the depths of the dark pool.

“Come away from the verge of the bank,” cried Miss Minckes, in alarm. “If you fall in there, you will never get out again.”

“Never fear; I shall not commit suicide yet awhile. There! will that relieve your anxiety?” said Blackadder, retiring a pace or two from the edge of the bank. “It looks pretty deep,” he added.

“I believe it’s the deepest part of the lake.”

“And no gravel about here. A nice bottom of good black oozy mud, eh?”

“Yes; I heard the Earl talking to the head gardener the other day, about having it cleaned out. Berry said it hadn’t been cleaned out for fifteen years. It’s considered a very dangerous spot.”

“All the better for that.”

“All the worse, you mean. Suppose anyone fell in. Even a good swimmer would be unable to save himself, if he once got imbedded in the mud, and entangled in the weeds.”

“A delightful spot!”

“A hateful spot, I think. It’s too serious to make a joke of. I hope the Earl will have it cleaned out, and levelled up.”

“I hope he will do nothing of the kind. It’s just the sort of place where, if a man drowned his enemy, the ghastly secret (as Novelists call it) might remain for many years undiscovered. Why, in a few months, the body would be so much changed as to defy identification.”

Miss Minckes looked at her lover, as he thus thought aloud. The idea, perhaps for the first time, entered her mind, that he was either mad, or a very dangerous companion! But she was in love, and wrestled promptly with the thought. “Oh!” she cried, with an involuntary shudder, “don’t talk and look like that. I know you’re joking; but you frighten me.”

“Consider now, Matilda. The Earl must hate his nephew.”

“Why?”

“Why, you simpleton! Mr. Forrester will never marry his one-eyed cousin. He will try to get off. The Earl will hold him to his engagement. Whichever way it turns out,

uncle and nephew will hate each other all the same. Then the nephew must hate his uncle for mortgaging the property, and felling the timber. The uncle must hate the man he is injuring, and who is besides, the heir-at-law. Everyone hates his heir! Far less than this mutual hatred, has caused many a good jolly murder. Listen! I'll rehearse how the noble Earl got rid of his Honourable Nephew, the Heir-at-law."

"Don't! I won't listen. I'll go away."

"You shall listen. You had better stop!" cried Blackadder, with a glance, that made Miss Minckes quail, and quelled her resistance at once.

She said: "Well, well, I'll listen. Only let go my arm."

He continued: "Uncle and nephew dine together. A good chance for poisoning the wine. But then, there would be a coroner's inquest. No, no; drowning is the best plan. They walk together after dinner. The nephew is intoxicated. The uncle has just taken enough to make him resolute. They come to this spot. It is dark. They are all alone. Uncle drops behind. Gives nephew one good shove. The trick's done. 'No eye beheld when William plunged Young Edmund in the stream.' Or, say, perhaps the nephew has the same kind intention towards the uncle. They have a deadly struggle on the brink, and both fall in, locked in each other's arms. Better still. A jolly double murder!"

Blackadder broke into a loud, discordant, sneering laugh. Beattie truly observes: "There are different kinds of laughter. A boy passing by night, through a churchyard, sings or whistles, to conceal his fear even from himself. There are men who, by forcing a smile, endeavour sometimes to hide from others, and from themselves too, perhaps, their malevolence or envy. The sound of such unnatural laughter offends the ear. The features distorted seem horrible. A mixture of hypocrisy, malice, and cruel joy thus displayed, is one of the most hateful sights in nature, and transforms the 'human face divine' into the visage of a fiend."* Beware of man or woman, with this habitual sneering laugh! Miss Minckes did not echo Blackadder's laugh. She was far too frightened.

"Pshaw! you little Silly. Did you think me in earnest? Don't you know I am writing a melodrama for a Transpontine theatre? And this situation just occurred to me. It will be one of the most telling scenes. Would you not like to see it acted?"

"No; I would not. I hate such tragedies."

"Well, I really believe I frightened you."

"You did, indeed!"

"Then, it must succeed. It's intensely realistic. But do you really think, if I hated a man ever so much, that I would murder him?"

* "Essay on Laughter and Ludicrous Composition."

"I—I—hope not."

"Murder is very good Stage-business; but a very foolish business in reality."

"A very wicked business."

"I don't know about *that*! But a man who commits a crime, is a great fool. There are plenty of ways of being revenged, without committing a crime."

"I suppose you are right."

"You suppose! Don't you know I am right? I'll soon have the Earl and Lady Honoria too, completely under my thumb. He found the courage to dismiss me. But when he knows how much I know about his peccadilloes — his illegal doings with the property—he will be glad to take me back again, or compound for my silence. Society will not tolerate beyond a certain amount of dishonesty and robbery, even in an *Earl*! Now suppose I had committed a crime, and he knew it, I should be in his power: not he in my power. He could snap his fingers at me!"

"I see. You are very clever. But take care. There is such a thing as being too clever. You may over-reach yourself."

Blackadder darted one of his basilisk glances at his companion. He half-suspected her of irony. But she evidently spoke in perfect good faith. He continued:

"Now, about Lady Honoria. She mortally offended me. She can't bear the sight of me.

I rather think her ladyship's pride is taken down a considerable number of pegs."

"I don't know about her pride. She's miserable enough, and not without cause. Poor thing, I pity her."

"You pity her?"

"I confess I do. Her calamity has so changed her appearance. And though she bears up wonderfully, and scorns all sympathy and pity, I know it must humble her."

"Well, is it not high time she was humbled?"

"But it was so terrible and sudden. I hope it was an accident. It was, was it not, Aaron? You had nothing to do with it, had you?"

"Why, what could *I* have had to do with it?"

"Why, you know you bear a grudge to the Curate. When you talked of Lady Honoria's pride being taken down, I thought it just possible—you won't be angry?"

"No; go on."

"I thought you might have bribed a lad to throw that petard, or whatever it was, at the Curate; but no—it can't be. You wouldn't be so vindictive, so mean! Besides, you say, a man who commits a crime, is a great fool. And if my lady had received the full charge, it might have been fatal. Even as it was, her recovery was doubtful. Dr. Downright says so."

While she was speaking, Blackadder had unconsciously, or intentionally, turned aside. Had Miss Minckes caught a glimpse of the fleeting expression on his averted face, she would probably have changed her opinion, as to his innocence, on the occasion to which she referred. The poor deluded young woman might possibly have thought herself in less danger in a wolf's den, than alone with her *Lover* near that deep pool! He suddenly said :

"What a beautiful day! I suppose Lady Honoria will visit her moping-place as usual."

"You mean the rustic seat by the ha-ha? Very likely."

"Shall you be with her?"

"I don't know. She generally prefers to be alone."

"Remember! should she take you; when you get there, you must make some excuse to leave her. Say you forgot something—your handkerchief—anything; only, you must make some excuse to leave her."

"On one condition. You are not going to injure her in any way?"

"Of course not, simpleton! You know my principle; never to commit a crime! And is it likely I would injure Lady Honoria in broad daylight in her own park? What should I get by it? That's not my idea of vengeance! Now, have I removed your scruples?"

"I will do as you bid me. But I do wish you would be frank with me. Tell me what you wish to see her for—do now, Aaron?"

"Well, my Matilda, I will. I'm going to bring about a meeting between Lady Honoria and her lover, the Curate."

"You are! Why she can't bear to hear his name mentioned."

"So much the better. There will be a scene, of which I shall be an auditor, if not a spectator, concealed in the ha-ha."

"But what is your purpose in bringing about this interview?"

"How can you ask such foolish questions? Have you no memory? Don't you recollect our conversation in the library on this subject?"

"The day the old lady called? Of course I do. But so much has happened since then. That was six months ago."*

"The situation is not materially changed. We have good reason to think there was a private understanding, if not an express engagement, between Lady Honoria and the Curate."

"Yes."

"Well, this unlucky accident throws him out for a time. But she may cotton to him again. Especially as she is not very likely to get anyone else."

"There's something in that."

"Well then, either there is a scene, and

* The conversation referred to, is in Book III., Chapter II.

she orders him away, out of her sight. That's nuts to me, and ought to be to you, after the way in which the Curate treated you."

"Well?"

"Or, they make it all up again; kiss, and be something more than friends. '*Amantium iræ amoris redintegratio est.*' Then, and in that case, as the lawyers say, we have a complete hold upon her ladyship. We can either keep her secret, or sell it to the Earl, according to which course pays best. I explained all that before."

"If that's all, I see no harm in the interview. Now that Lady Honoria is so disfigured, you think her cousin will refuse to marry her?"

"I'll lay any money he will. He was never very keen on the match. He would have taken a beauty, without fortune. Not a one-eyed lady, with only £200 a-year. He must have the estate, without that encumbrance, if he outlive the Earl."

"Mr. Forrester has not been here, since the accident."

"That shows how much he cares for her now!"

"Yes; and I know the Earl don't like his keeping away. If Lady Honoria should not marry her cousin, and still fancies the Curate, the Earl might relent, and give his consent. So the interview may be all for the best, after all."

“Exactly so.”

It did not enter into Blackadder's calculations, really to reconcile the lovers. As the sequel will show, nothing was actually further from his machinations. But Miss Minckes's concurrence was necessary to their success. He feared to alarm his dupe. So, while affecting to give her his confidence, he kept her quite in the dark, as to his signal and original scheme of vengeance. He gave Miss Minckes a parting embrace, looked after her, and soliloquised; “So, my dear, you are getting scrupulous.

“If so, I'm afraid you won't do for me long;

Your money once mine, you may go to Hong Kong!”

At about a quarter to three o'clock, p.m., Lady Honoria approached the scene of the “Tournament of Doves,” and sat down upon the rustic seat near the ha-ha. Her ladyship held a book mechanically. But she seemed too preoccupied to read. Suddenly, Blackadder appeared before her, rising up, as it were, out of the ground, as he emerged from the ha-ha! The abrupt appearance of such a man, in such a manner, would have startled a person of weaker nerves. If Blackadder calculated on frightening Lady Honoria, he was disappointed. Beyond a scarcely perceptible start, her ladyship seemed quite collected. Probably, Blackadder reckoned on Lady Honoria's remarkable courage, not to shrink from an interview. Had she shrieked for

assistance, or fainted, or left the spot, the villain's original scheme of vengeance would have been incomplete. Lady Honoria, in spite of her bodily and mental sufferings, proved equal to herself. She did not decline the trial. And what a trial! If Blackadder's purpose was to insult and annoy her, past all human endurance, he could not have proceeded more effectively! He began by making a lowly mock reverence, of which Lady Honoria took no notice. Then, he slowly, deliberately, and emphatically, recited these lines of Moore:—

“When I lov'd you, I can't but allow
I had many an exquisite minute;
But the scorn that I feel for you now
Hath even more luxury in it!

“Thus, whether we're on, or we're off,
Some witchery seems to await you;
To love you is pleasant enough,
And, oh! 'tis delicious to hate you!”

“These lines do not exactly express the relations between us, nor my sentiments towards you, fair lady! I did hate you, after your extreme insolence to me, your humble admirer. But since the accident of May-day, on this spot, I think I almost begin to *pity* you. I was not aware that there was such a great difference in social position, between an Earl's private Secretary, and a Curate; both enjoying a beggarly stipend of £150 a year! Until your ladyship kindly condescended to give me a practical lesson, I

always imagined that every *honest* man paid a woman a compliment, in admiring her. I thought that even the vast difference in social rank, between us, did not exonerate you from giving me at least that civil answer, which turneth away wrath! Your ladyship does not condescend to speak. But, if I correctly interpret a certain involuntary elevation of the corners of your aristocratic mouth, you sneer inwardly at my appropriating the term *honest* to myself. And yet, as people go, I am honest. I have broken no law. I have committed no crime. In spite of that most expressive sniff of contempt, I assure your ladyship, I have not! And if you knew as much of your Noble father's affairs, as I do, you would agree with me, that I better deserve the title of an honest man than he does! I fancy you wince a little at that statement. But I am here to speak about yourself—not about your father. 'Trusting to the old sayings, 'A cat may look at a king.' 'If I love you, what is that to you?' 'Love levels ranks,' &c., I rashly disclosed my admiration, or affection, for your ladyship! You remember how you turned upon me, and shut me up at once. Pardon the vulgarity. You charged me with being *drunk*. Your ladyship condescended to use that strong, sound Saxon word. Would you have used it to Lord Oddfish, who was often in a far worse condition? Oh, no! When his lordship had as much wine as he could stagger

under, *he* was never drunk ; but only elevated, exhilarated ! As a matter of fact, I was not drunk. I will not deny that it was after dinner with me, and that I had got up a supply of Dutch courage, to enable me to face such a beauty as your ladyship—*was* ! But I still deny that I was drunk, or that I merited the extremely insolent rebuke of your ladyship. A little gentleness and pity, *then*, might have made me a friend, instead of a mortal enemy ! *Apropos*, my lady, did it ever strike you, that I bear the name of a poisonous reptile ? I think I possess a little of its poisonous nature. Ordinary church-going Christians, while never forgiving their enemies, delude themselves with the idea, that they are not revengeful. They go to Sacrament, and piously eat and drink damnation to themselves ! I am not like one of these foolish hypocrites ! I don't pretend to forgive. I believe your ladyship has read Darwin ; the book condemned from the pulpit, by our exemplary Rector, who never read a line of it, and could not understand it, if he had ! If Darwin's theory of man's animal origin, be true, I fancy I can trace my ancestry directly to the Black Adder ! Your Noble papa only goes back to the Conquest, a pedigree of yesterday ! If descended from the Black Adder, I inherit its nature. I cannot help stinging those that trample upon me ! ”

Here, Blackadder paused, as if expecting a reply. Lady Honoria sat without speak-

ing, moving or looking at him. He continued:—

“Perhaps your ladyship wonders why I am here? To sympathise with, and condole your ladyship, on your calamity. The loss of an eye is a very painful thing. It must seriously affect vision. With only one eye, it is impossible to judge of distances. Does not your ladyship find it so? For example, you cannot exactly know how far I am from you. Your accident may make it difficult, if not impossible, for your ladyship to follow your favourite field-sports. You will hardly be able to follow the hounds next winter. At least, you must ride much more carefully. Not in your former helter-skelter style. So much for material disabilities. But there are others far more serious. Lady Honoria Forrester belonged to *la crème de la crème* of Society. I have heard, your dearest friends in London, actually missed and mourned for you; at least condoled in words, for one whole week! Ah! how delightful to have such dear friends! No wonder we poor Plebeians envy the warmth, cordiality, and tender feeling, characteristic of Patrician Society! Your ladyship *was* ‘The glass of fashion, and the mould of form.’ You had many admirers. Now, you will discover whether you were truly loved by any of them. You will know whether you were sought for your mental and moral accomplishments; or only for that physical, perishable, and dangerous

beauty, which the French significantly call *La Beauté du Diable*. Now, you will enjoy the inestimable privilege of being loved for yourself—that is, if you are loved at all! Report said that you were engaged to your cousin, the Honourable Mr. Forrester, heir to the estate. He has not been here, since May-day, upwards of two months since; nor for a long time before that date. An ardent lover would have flown to your feet, to assure you of his undying affection. His keeping away looks ill. Perhaps when your cousin *does come*, he will be able to explain his absence. Surely such a trifle as the loss of an eye, will not diminish his affection. He is reported a man of gallantry; truly Oriental in his love of the Sex, striving to approach King Solomon, in the number of his personal attachments. Perhaps, like the Wisest of men, surfeited with physical beauty. Let us trust that his large experience has not lowered his opinion of women. Solomon did not think well of women. But your cousin has the advantage of being a Christian, and a member of our Reformed Church. He is likewise an Aristocrat, and of course a man of feeling. *Noblesse oblige!* No decrease of your personal charms, can alienate an affection founded on so sure a basis—reciprocity of taste, and mutual esteem!”

Once more, Blackadder paused. The fiend in human shape, thought it impossible for female fortitude longer to endure such keen

mental torture, without any outward and visible sign. There was none at least that he could detect. Wonderful indeed was Lady Honoria's self-command! Royalty and Nobility render many women all the more impatient of contumely. An ordinary woman would have flown, like a tigress, at her tormentor, and stabbed him to his false heart, with a steel bodkin. And under such provocation, the act might be called justifiable homicide. Women of gentler nature would have wept, wailed, or swooned away from agony; or died outright, from mortified feelings. Other women would have pursued a middle course; and by retiring, have owned themselves defeated. We all know women who would have returned railing for railing, and vanquished him with his own weapons. The Plebeian woman would have spat in his face, attacked him tooth and nail, and torn his hair from his head. But she who for the first time, I call my *HEROINE*, proved herself a woman among ten thousand; by keeping her temper, under provocations which would have driven frantic, the vast majority of her sex! If at times, her heart beat faster, and her breath came quicker, it was impossible to trace any more visible signs of emotion. Her tormentor might have been speaking an unknown language, for any evidence of emotion she displayed. Lady Honoria sat immovable as a statue—impassive, inscrutable as the Sphinx. She looked not down, nor up, nor about her.

She neither tossed her head, nor made any gesture which could be interpreted by Blackadder, into a symptom that his cutting words had at last exhausted her patience. She did not even take refuge in her book, which some women in her place, would have done ; though their trembling hands could not hold the volume steady enough to feign reading !

Lady Honoria looked straight before her, as if alone, and absorbed in thought. Her extraordinary calmness and self-control, in this most severe trial, may have resulted from high breeding, and inculcation of Christian principles. But whatever its cause, whether the result of careful study, or involuntary ; it was the very best conduct Lady Honoria could have adopted, to annoy her enemy !

Blackadder's scheme of vengeance was now displayed in full operation. Wounds, or death itself, would have been trivial, to the mental agony he hoped to inflict. He had evidently set his heart upon exasperating her beyond womanly endurance. He was speaking daggers to her. While metaphorically stabbing her to the heart, he was turning the dagger in the wound, and desiring his victim to admire the ornamental handle of the weapon ! Yet still his vengeance was incomplete. It wanted that thorough gratification, that seal of success, which the acknowledgment of the vanquished can alone supply. Either Blackadder was not so good a judge of the Sex, as he believed himself : or Lady Honoria was

a complete exception to the general rule. He appeared to have met his match in her. Blood and culture will tell ! Perhaps with 9,999 in 10,000 women, he would have succeeded ! Each would, sooner or later, have lost her temper, and thus given victory to the tormentor. But Lady Honoria defied his unmanly tactics. They recoiled on himself. If he could but have provoked a reply, or in some way, ever so slightly, have destroyed her immobility, he would have been satisfied. As it was, her impassive attitude, and perfect self-control, first surprised, then annoyed, and finally made him lose his temper, and thereby confess himself vanquished ! Nevertheless, he made another attempt.

“It must add greatly to your ladyship’s mortification, to reflect, that this sad accident occurred, while you were engaged, not harmlessly in shooting at a mark, or at a target ; but while presiding over a very questionable, or decidedly cruel Aristocratic sport. Spite of Princes and Peers, these Tournaments of Doves will in time, be made illegal. You, Lady Honoria, were exhibiting your Clerical admirer in a very unclerical occupation. You were in the very act of making him eat his own words, and fire at a poor pigeon, when he was made the instrument to punish your cruelty and pride. Poetical Justice ! I am not particularly religious, but it does look like a judgment on your ladyship. Had a poor woman lost an eye, under similar circum-

stances, all the pulpits for miles round, would have echoed with denunciations and illustrations. Of course our hypocritical old Rector was as mute as a mouse. He made the accident an excuse for dismissing his Curate. The Rector had a spite against him, and wished to curry favour with the Earl. Of course, the Rector dare not wag his tongue against Lady Honoria Forrester. But people will talk. I only tell your ladyship what public opinion says. On the same day, Dame Howlett lost an eye. *She* has the consolation to reflect that *she* had done nothing to deserve *her* misfortune. The accident was quite independent of her. *She* was not engaged, like your ladyship, at a Tournament of Doves. All these reflections must try your Christian patience and fortitude. I am distressed to learn that your ladyship is wanting in magnanimity. You have not forgiven the Rev. Mr. Weatherall. He, poor fellow, tells me that he has written several letters, all of which have been returned, unopened. I thought Aristocrats never condescended to such commonplace vulgar rudeness! I tried to comfort him by suggesting that this might be the Earl's act, and not your ladyship's. And I have reason to think that the poor ex curate will be here soon, to plead his cause in person."

Blackadder fancied Lady Honoria did display a slight symptom of emotion, at this intelligence; and proceeded, as he hoped, to irritate her into some violent outbreak.

“I hope your ladyship will forgive and forget—or rather not forget that the Curate was your favourite suitor. ‘Kiss and be friends,’ as children say. Don’t be too hard upon the poor fellow. Indeed, in your own interest, you ought not to discourage him. He is now your sole admirer. The last rose of summer left blooming alone. All his former companions have mizzled, and gone. Pardon the paraphrase. It is too exact. All your fashionable suitors have flown. The Honourable Mr. Forrester is rather backward in coming forward. Without fortune, and with such a blemish to your beauty, your ladyship has ceased to be a grand matrimonial prize. Perhaps you have hardly had time to *realise* that fact, as your American friend Mr. Spry would say. You might do worse than marry the ex-Curate. You have £200 per annum, in your own right. The ex-Curate may get another curacy. Or that Reverend timeserver, the Rector, will take him on again, to please the Earl. You could rub on, and make both ends meet, upon £350 a year, until such time as your husband got preferment. You have had a sharp lesson not to be proud, or too hard to please.”

Again he paused. Still no answer. Still the same enigmatical silence, and Sphinx-like calm! Time was flying. So far as he was concerned, Blackadder was most effectually doing his infernal work. Yet still he hungered and panted after some sign, that he had

not laboured in vain! A brief reply, an exclamation of distress, a gesture of impatience, would have been some satisfaction to him. Irritated by the absence of all such indications of suffering, he at last lost his temper. He was no longer the civil, sneering, mocking Mephistopheles. He burst forth in the natural language of passion. He exclaimed vindictively:—

“Woman! can I not make you feel? Then dread my future vengeance! Do you not know—can you not guess how completely you are in my power, from my intimate knowledge of the Earl’s private affairs? I can expose his mean *illegal* conduct about the Estate. I can, and will tell the world, that he and you have been living for years, feasting, entertaining, lavishly squandering borrowed money, obtained by sufferance, to the injury of the next heir! And that to obtain this accommodation, the noble Earl does not scruple to sell you, his only child, in marriage, to a selfish sensualist whom you do not love! And that you are a party to this vile transaction. I can tell you more. Perhaps this will stir the calm repose of Lady Vere de Vere! What, if your latest fancy, the Wild Curate, knew this, and traded on it! You think the loss of your left eye was accidental? Why then do you not forgive the innocent cause? In that case, the Curate is no more to blame, than the gun itself. Shall I tell you why you do not forgive? Because you have a sus-

picion, if not a conviction of the truth, that the Curate intentionally wounded you!"

Lady Honoria gave a perceptible start.

"Aha! you start! I have touched you at last. Do you wonder why the Curate wounded you? No, you have already guessed the reason. The motive is obvious, in the actual result! The Curate wounded you—not in the body—from which you might have recovered, with no loss of beauty. That would not have served his purpose. He did what Cæsar ordered his veterans to do, at the battle of Pharsalia: '*Feri Faciem!*' Strike at the face! And 'the pretty young dancers' fled, to save their faces! The Wild Curate aimed at your face, to spoil your beauty. His object was to depreciate, or destroy your matrimonial value, for any one but himself! He had his doubts whether you really loved, or only flirted with him. Like a desperate man, he argued: Either I will make her glad to marry me; or, if she throws me over, and jilts me, she shall carry the mark of my vengeance to the grave! Is it not so? Has he not done so? *Has he not marked you for his own?* It was a dangerous experiment, I grant. But so far, it has succeeded. The once beautiful, fashionable, and fastidious Lady Honoria, may now be only too glad to take up with her Wild Curate. He has given most striking proofs of his affection! Better marry him who really loves you, than die an old maid, or be married by your cousin

out of pity! 'All's fair in love and war.' If you never intended to marry the Curate, whom you ruined, you are a flirt and a jilt. You have escaped well with the loss of an eye. Some women pay for such crimes, by the loss of their lives!"

There is a limit to human patience. That limit luckily appeared to be now reached. For it was probable, that if the tumultuous feelings, hitherto so wonderfully controlled, found no safety-valve in speech, there was serious danger to Lady Honoria's life or reason! The critical moment was reached, when Blackadder's provocation, if continued, might have had a fatal result. But the spell was broken. At length Lady Honoria spoke. In a voice neither trembling, nor hysterical, she said:—

"Have you quite finished, Mr. Blackadder?"

"Yes," he replied, overjoyed that he had at last provoked a reply, and anticipating his revenge.

Lady Honoria said: "This interview was unexpected, and unsought by me. Your idea of revenge is singular. I have neither interrupted, nor bandied words with you. You thought you could provoke me to lose my temper. You have ended by losing your own. You have threatened me. You declare me in your power. Do you not know that you are at this moment in my power?"

"As how, fair lady? I neither know, nor believe anything of the kind."

“You cannot guess?”

“Not I, unless you mean that you can order me off, for trespassing on your Noble father’s *mortgaged* Park! I stand on the verge of the sacred soil. A few paces place me beyond the ha-ha.”

“You mistake. You are in my power, by the attempt to commit a crime. I could at this moment, have you arrested on a criminal charge.”

Blackadder burst into a peal of mocking laughter. When he had finished, Lady Honoria resumed:

“You do not believe me. You noticed my involuntary smile, a little while ago, when you spoke of your *honesty*, and boasted that you had broken no law, committed no crime——”

“Neither have I,” interrupted Blackadder.

“That is not true. Do you forget, or tell a deliberate falsehood? Or is your conscience so seared, that you consider murder no crime?”

“Murder!” echoed Blackadder. “I never committed murder.”

“You tried to commit murder, about half-past nine, on the evening of the 10th of April last. Whom did you desire to kill—him or me, when you put a pistol-bullet through Rev. Mr. Weatherall’s hat, as we rode slowly past you in Avenue Lane?”

Blackadder tried to force a laugh, and said: “This is all assertion—What proof?”

“You were out that evening. You tried

to reach Laxington House before us. You failed. You passed us in the Court-yard. You trembled, and changed colour. You were disconcerted. And you dropped something which was afterwards picked up by Locket, the gate-porter. Do you know what it was? Have you missed anything? Your pistol, which had been recently discharged, with your name engraved on the stock, is now in my possession. My evidence; the Curate's—his hat shot through; Locket's testimony; your confusion—All point to *you*, as the would-be assassin! But the discovery of your own pistol, evidently dropped in your confusion, completes the chain of circumstantial evidence! You are completely in my power. Your present attitude admits it. You look the picture of despair!"

It was indeed so. Blackadder was vanquished, at the very crisis of his anticipated victory. He had evidently expected a very different charge—one involving the identification of himself with the man in the smock-frock, who threw the cracker. This charge he could afford to despise. It could only be proved by the Gipsy, whom he believed far away. But even if it could be proved, it would be difficult, or impossible, to make him responsible for the shocking results. But the charge of attempting to kill the Curate, was true. On that evening, Blackadder had been in the dark lane. He had skulked aside, to let the lovers pass. Their mutual good

understanding—above all, the tender attitude of his rival, maddened him with rage and jealousy. Yielding to the impulse of the moment, he fired, and narrowly escaped being in fact, as well as in intention—a murderer! The man who boasted of not breaking the law, of not committing a crime, had broken through his rule. But his secret, he thought known to none but himself. In God, he did not believe! And now, the sudden discovery of the truth, the charge of attempted murder, the display of evidence to prove him guilty, the conviction that he was actually in the power of the woman, whom he had been goading on to fury!—what wonder if these cumulative blows, overwhelmed him? He reeled, and seemed about to fall. Presently, with a great effort, he pulled himself together, and tried to think. Lady Honoria had declared his pistol in her possession. He understood her to mean literally upon her person. If he could recover that pistol, the principal link in the chain of circumstantial evidence would be lost. Why should he not close with, and wrest it from her? He advanced a pace, with the stealthy motion of a tiger, intent to spring. But Lady Honoria was watching him. She was equal to the occasion. She exclaimed:

“No nearer—or, your blood be upon your head!” He stopped irresolute. She continued: “I am armed. Do you think that otherwise I would have trusted myself alone

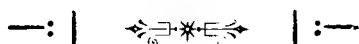
with *you*? You are doubly in my power. I would leave you to the law. But I warn you, my patience is exhausted. If you attempt to rush upon me, I will shoot you down, as I would a wild beast !”

The secret of Lady Honoria's self-control was now explained. She could afford to listen patiently, to the gross insults of a man she loathed and despised, just so long as he confined his insolence to mere words—but no longer! As she uttered the threat, she suited the action to the word. The stately lady rose to her full height, produced a pistol; cocked, and presented it. Speaking from experience, Byron observes :

“ It has a strange quick jar upon the ear,
That cocking of a pistol, when you know
A moment more will bring the sight to bear
Upon your person, twelve yards off, or so;
A gentlemanly distance, not too near
If you have got a former friend for foe;
But after being fir'd at once or twice,
The ear becomes more Irish, and less nice.”

Perhaps Blackadder had never, till now, stood before a cocked, and presented pistol. Perhaps he was not altogether cowed by the pistol. He might have stood his ground, and risked a shot from Lady Honoria. At this moment, he caught sight of a distant figure approaching. It may have been one or other of these causes; or all of them together. But the fact is, that no sooner did he catch sight of the pistol, and hear the ominous

click of the lock, than he acted more like "Bob Acres," than "Sir Lucius O'Trigger." Blackadder behaved like one who has lost his courage, but not altogether his self possession. He dropped at once to earth, partly crawled, partly wriggled to the verge of the ha-ha; and rolled rapidly down the bank, out of sight. Such was the ignominious exit of the ex-Secretary, in the moment of his expected triumph!"



CHAPTER VII.

THE INJUSTICE OF PASSION!—THE CURATE
DISMISSED!—THE IMPENDING SUICIDE!

ARRIVED at the bottom of the ha-ha, and no longer a mark for Lady Honoria's pistol, Blackadder had leisure to collect his thoughts. He lay still for some minutes to reflect. He guessed that the person approaching, was the Curate. Blackadder had resolved to be an eye-witness, if not an ear-witness, of the interview. He therefore removed his hat, and wriggled up the steep bank, in a very serpentine manner, resembling his reptile namesake. He thus brought his eyes on a level with the top of the bank. He could see, without being seen. He became a concealed observer of the following interview; although the persons were too far off, for him to hear distinctly all their conversation. Blackadder observed with satisfaction, that Lady Honoria rested satisfied with her victory. She had made him retreat. She did not pursue, but resumed her seat. A figure approached, like Rezenvelt, "tossing and agitated!" It proved to be the Curate. He had carefully noted place and time. It was now exactly four o'clock. Blackadder had named this hour, so as to have time

enough to execute his truly infernal purpose, of poisoning Lady Honoria's mind, just before the interview with the Curate. To this I referred at close of Chapter V., in saying that Blackadder had succeeded beyond his most sanguine expectations. It was most important that his interview with Lady Honoria, should be followed *immediately* by that with the Curate. Otherwise, the intervention of a day or two, would, by allowing time for calm reflection, neutralize, or destroy the whole effect of Blackadder's revelations!

It must be confessed, that in spite of Lady Honoria's serious counter-charge, the apparent turning of the tables, and temporary rout of Blackadder; his carefully-concocted ruse had succeeded only too well. As it actually turned out, the Curate's attempt at a reconciliation could hardly have been more ill-timed. Lady Honoria was smarting with indignation, under the gross personal provocation she had just received. Blackadder's diabolical ingenuity had so confounded truth and falsehood, that it required much clearer faculties, than Lady Honoria *then* possessed, to disentangle one from the other. The vile ebullition of Blackadder's spite, she attributed to its true motive—personal revenge for her severe punishment of his insolence, exasperated by his dismissal from his appointment. She had borne his railing with surprising fortitude. But the two pieces of startling intelligence hurled

at her, in the peroration of the disappointed villain, fairly confounded her. The threat of exposing the Earl's mismanagement of the Estate; the statement that, she and her father had for years, been living on money raised on illegal mortgage of the property, by sufferance of the heir-at-law, bribed by the promise of her hand; horrified her! This was followed immediately, by the bold lie denouncing the Curate, as the intentional inflicter of her wound! Monstrous as the charge was, it had been led up to, and prepared, by previous statements. According to Blackadder, the Curate had communicated in confidence, that his letters had been returned unopened; and his intention to seek a personal interview with Lady Honoria. If the Curate had actually betrayed such a delicate secret as his engagement to Lady Honoria, why suppose that the confidence stopped there? Blackadder was apparently pleading his friend's cause. Why invent such a charge? And if true, it must have been communicated by the Curate! Lady Honoria's hasty reflections tended to support the assertion, that the Curate had wilfully wounded her. She jumped to the conclusion that the plot had been arranged between the pair!

The statement was indeed totally inconsistent with Blackadder's assumed position—pleading a friend's cause. But this discrepancy was reconciled, by remembering the fact, that Blackadder had let this damaging admission

escape him, in a moment of rage, when forgetful of the consequences; and intent far more upon annoying Lady Honoria, than serving his friend and confederate. With calm reflection, Lady Honoria's well-balanced mind would have arrived at a totally different conclusion. She would then have perceived that Blackadder's statements were totally inconsistent with themselves; that his charge against the Curate, was diametrically irreconcilable with his previous professions of regard for him; that he was not serving—but betraying the Curate; acting like an implacable enemy. Lady Honoria would not then have credited the monstrous assertion, that the Curate had deliberately wounded her in the face, so as to prevent her marrying any one but himself; in Blackadder's words "marked her for his own." She would have reflected that the Curate loved her too dearly to do her the slightest injury. And that the Curate must have gone mad, before he could conceive such a project, or tell it in confidence to Blackadder! In short, good sense would have led her to reject Blackadder's story. And Lady Honoria might, and probably would, have avoided the artful trap, to render the breach between her and her lover irreconcilable.

But there was no time for calm reflection. The poison of Blackadder's words was fiercely operating, unchecked by any antidote. So plausible did the charge seem, so artfully was

it supported, so well did it chime in with Lady Honoria's very natural feeling of resentment towards the actual instrument of her calamity; so completely did it tend to exonerate all her own faults, and preclude self-condemnation; that the unhappy young lady temporarily believed it. She was really incapable of the mental and moral energy, requisite to analyse and detect the falsehood. In addition, her feelings had been wrought up to such a pitch of excitement, that some form of relief was absolutely necessary. This explanation may account for Lady Honoria, believing a false charge against her lover; even though that charge was made by a man whom she loathed, and despised, as a would-be assassin, who had attempted her lover's life! Woman's mind is certainly not so logical as man's. No wonder that when agitated by passion, she should reason, and act, inconsequently. Unable to conceal, I would palliate Lady Honoria's horrible injustice to her lover. At this crisis, appeared the scapegoat. The man who had wrought all the mischief, had escaped. The innocent victim appeared, in the form of "The Wild Curate."

He advanced rapidly towards her, and fell on his knees. Not on one knee, as sham lovers do! Lady Honoria was too excited to note the impression made on him, by the first sight of her face, disfigured by the black patch over the left eye. He sobbed out:—"O, my beloved! If you knew how I have

pined for this opportunity, you would hear me, before I die. I shall not live long. Only say, you forgive me. I am a ruined man; my peace and prospects both destroyed. I have to begin the world anew. I can bear all, but the thought of your anger. Only say you will try to forgive me, in time—dear Lady Honoria! It was wrong of me to dare to love you, I know; but I was mad. If men of the world have made a similar mistake, do not be hard on a poor bookworm like me. But I will never offend more. Only let me go with a heart at rest, knowing that you forgive my unconscious act.”

Hitherto, he had spoken with his eyes cast down. He now ventured to raise them. The sight of Lady Honoria’s flushed face, and the black patch on her left eye, overcame him. He broke down, and wept aloud! Under other circumstances, Lady Honoria (softened by such genuine grief), would have pitied, and pardoned him. Now, perverted by the false accusation instilled into her mind, she only saw before her, an accomplished dissembler, an artful hypocrite, capable of shedding at will, crocodile tears!

It must be remembered that Blackadder had, with consummate deceit, adduced the Curate’s statement (wormed out of him in confidence) that his letters to Lady Honoria, had been returned, unopened. This had made a great impression on Lady Honoria. “So,” she thought “the Curate tells every one, that I am

unforgiving, and will not read his letters." This belief tended to support the false statement, that the Curate was playing a deep double game; that he had deliberately blemished her beauty; *had marked her for his own*; trusting thus, either to marry her, or have his revenge, by hindering her from marrying at all! Instead of seeing the poor afflicted wretched man, as he really was, bowed down to the dust with sorrow, at the result of his own innocent act;—the only true lover, she had in the world (the worthiest and best, she had ever had), whose affection, far from being diminished, was increased by the blemish to her beauty; Lady Honoria saw in the Curate, a deliberate dissembler, making capital out of his premeditated wicked act; adding to his baseness, hypocritical professions of love, and acting a distress which he did not feel! She was, under this delusion, exasperated beyond endurance. Her long pent-up indignation was poured forth like a torrent of lava. Her withering scorn fell upon an innocent man. Among womanly accomplishments and virtues, cannot be enumerated a distinct aptitude for *Logic* and *Justice*.

"So—wretch, monster! You think you can continue to hoodwink and deceive me? That I do not see through your vile hypocrisy? Look here—this is your handiwork!" She pointed to the black velvet patch concealing the extinguished eye "This, I shall carry to my grave. You have shed my blood. You have

marked me for life. You come here to gloat over your successful villainy. You have the awful audacity to think I belong to you, because you have wilfully cast a shadow over my life, and hindered me from marrying in my own sphere! You have the unparalleled effrontery to pretend grief, and ask forgiveness, and you think to reap the fruit of your crime—Yes *crime*—Beware how you provoke me to punish your unexampled baseness. You are liable to a prosecution for maliciously wounding. And I am almost tempted to take legal proceedings. Out of my sight! Do not pollute the air longer. Go at once. Or, by heaven, I will summon my servants, and deliver you to the menial punishment you deserve. Go—or remain at peril of being whipped hence, like a hound—”

“Alas! The love of women! It is known
To be a lovely and a fearful thing;
For all of theirs upon that die is thrown,
And if 'tis lost, life hath no more to bring
To them but mockeries of the past alone;
And their revenge is as the tiger's spring,
Deadly, and quick, and crushing; yet as real
Torture is theirs, what they inflict they feel.”

Yes, Horace is right. “Anger is a short madness.” Lady Honoria was beside herself with rage. Else she might, and would surely have perceived the genuine astonishment, which this burst of fury produced in Mr. Weatherall. He was literally overwhelmed, and for some minutes, physically incapable of

speaking. At length, as if speaking to himself, he faltered out: O God! She thinks I wounded her on purpose——”

“I *know* you did” thundered Lady Honoria. “*You marked me for your own!* Gaze on your handiwork! Enjoy your revenge!”

Once more, he wailed forth; “She accuses me of shedding her blood, purposely. Oh, it is too dreadful! Oh my God! and I would have died to save her from injury. Have mercy——”

He literally fell at her feet. The poor humbled man crawled and grovelled, like a crushed worm, on the grass before her.

“Ah! do not presume to touch me!” cried Lady Honoria, starting back, as though from a reptile.

The Curate had mechanically sought to touch her hand. And had he succeeded in touching, in catching, and in detaining her hand, possibly the subtle electric influence produced by that actual personal contact, might have helped to undeceive Lady Honoria—and—who knows?—might have taught her, ere it was too late, the truth of his innocence, and her horrible injustice. But it was not to be. He rose slowly, stumbling, more like an old man of seventy, than a young man not twenty-seven; and mumbled out a few incoherent words, such as—“Listen—explain—know all—Honoria!” But Lady Honoria continued to waive him away from her, with expressive gestures of contempt.

“Is—this—final?”

She vouchsafed no reply in words, but made another haughty gesture of dismissal. He looked at her earnestly, for the space of a minute;—seemed inclined to make another appeal—apparently thought better of it, and then, with an effort, spoke slowly and distinctly these words:—“Honoriam!” some enemy has slandered me—I forgive you—when I am dead and gone—and when you know all—do justice to my memory—*Pray for my soul!*”

Then, he slowly withdrew. A strange undefinable feeling came over Lady Honoriam, as she watched the Curate’s retreating form, tottering, and stumbling out of sight! If this were acting, she had never seen acting on the Stage. She fancied sometimes that he looked back. A secret impulse urged her to make a sign, to beckon, and call him back; even to go after, and give him a chance to clear himself. Was this the voice of her good angel prompting her to do right? Alas! there was also another prompter. The evil spirit *Pride* gained the day. She resisted the mysterious impulse. To call him back, or to go after him, to seek another interview, to confess that she had been hasty, wrong, to listen to accusations which he had no opportunity to rebut—to do this, would be unconventional, improper, unladylike! We are never without excuses for disobeying the dictates of conscience. So, Lady Honoriam sat

still. Yet, ever and anon, fancy brought that poor trembling man before her, though his actual form had vanished among the trees. She seemed to hear his last words :—“Honor! some enemy has slandered me—I forgive you. When I am dead and gone—and when you know all—do justice to my memory—*Pray for my soul!*”

While Lady Honor! remained a prey to contending emotions, the Curate staggered on, but not quite unobserved. The concealed spectator chuckled over a scene surpassing even his expectations. Blackadder had heard the angry burst of denunciation, with which Lady Honor! dismissed the Curate. So far, the infernal scheme of vengeance had succeeded. The arch-plotter desired to see the *dénouement*. Sliding noiselessly down towards the sunk wall, he glided along a short distance, and regained the park, unseen by Lady Honor!. Blackadder soon came in sight of the Curate, and kept him in view. The unhappy man wandered on as if aimlessly, without once looking back, down into the valley. When in view of the lake, he stopped, as if struck with a thought. Then he walked on, till he came to where the water was deepest; the very spot which Blackadder and Miss Minckes had occupied some two hours before. The Curate stood a while on the brink, peering down into the deep dark water. Blackadder flitted from tree to tree, till he was within a dozen paces of him. Opportunity had previously

tempted Blackadder to shoot—it now tempted him to drown the Curate! How easy would it be to act in reality, the scene he had rehearsed two hours previously, to his frightened companion. To this horrible temptation, Blackadder, *an Atheist*, had neither Faith, nor Principle, to oppose—nothing but the feeble dictates of expediency. It was against his principle, to put himself within the power of the law, by a crime. But he was already within the power of the law, by attempting to kill the Curate, on the evening of the 10th of April. Lady Honoria had charged Blackadder with that crime. It was known. And there was sufficient evidence to convince a jury, that he was the would-be assassin. He saw himself arrested, tried, convicted, sentenced to a long term of imprisonment, if not for life. And all this might be avoided by one resolute rush upon that unsuspecting man, now almost stooping over that deep pool. Here was his “enemy,” rival; the man whom he hated, and whom he had already tried to kill—delivered into his hand. The body might never be found; or if it should be, there was no evidence to connect Blackadder with the crime. It would be suicide; or, as the last person from whom the Curate parted, was Lady Honoria in anger, some suspicion of foul play might even attach to *her*!

And then the Tempter added this argument. After all, what had the Curate to live for now? All was over between him and Lady

Honoria. He had just been ignominiously dismissed by the woman he loved. The Tempter kept carefully out of mind, this important fact: That the misunderstanding causing all the misery between the lovers, was Blackadder's own doing, and might easily be removed by him. The Tempter's concluding suggestion was; That it would be merciful to put the Curate out of his misery; an act of *Euthanasia*, utterly undeserving the harsh name of *Murder*! Thus, the tempted Atheist argued, as tempted Atheists have often argued, and will often argue. What then? Christians are likewise tempted. But the Christian is armed; and at least when he yields, *knows* that he sins! *He* cannot juggle with his conscience. The *Atheist* does, until all distinctions between right and wrong, are quite obliterated. He is the veriest slave of passion, while boasting of his reason! In this case, Blackadder was clearly convinced that killing was no murder. Expediency, instead of holding him back, aided and abetted the instincts of Hatred. The intending murderer had actually stepped from behind a tree, about to creep stealthily upon his victim, when the Curate moved! Blackadder had just time to conceal himself again, without being observed. The Curate looked round in all directions, as if to ascertain that there were no observers. Then he retraced his steps a short distance, to a heap of stones. Another hasty glance, and then he

began deliberately filling his pockets with stones.

From behind a tree, Blackadder carefully watched all these movements. But there appeared a method in his madness. Blackadder correctly concluded that the unhappy man had meditated—and was now resolved on—self destruction. Needless to state, Blackadder made no attempt to interpose. He thought thus: “How lucky he did not see me. So the beggar means to save me the trouble. He has the pluck to drown himself. He goes about his work methodically. He really means business, by filling his pockets with those stones. Well, better thus. Never commit an unnecessary crime. A precious fool I would have been to anticipate him! I might not have succeeded. The instinct of self-preservation often makes an intending suicide struggle with his intending murderer. Now, if he kills himself, I am not to blame. Or at least, no one knows that I witnessed his suicide, without interfering to prevent his jumping into the water. And afterwards, it was too late! What a lucky chance! His death is most convenient. Lady Honoria cannot proceed against me. The principal witness will be wanting. I can keep her quiet with a counter-threat. Or, should the worst come to the worst, I can tell all I know of the interview between her and the Curate. She, as the last person seen in his company, will be morally, if not legally, an accessory

before the fact. Anyway, his death will compromise her, and work well for me." Another curious specimen of the self-deceptive sophistry of Atheistic argument! This clever, cold-blooded villain prided himself on not committing an unnecessary crime. He was now about deliberately to witness a suicide, which he could have easily prevented, without the least risk to himself. For he had only to appear, to make the Curate abandon his fatal purpose. Blackadder was about to be, morally, if not legally, an accessory to murder! That is, to be guilty of the very crime he falsely attributed to Lady Honoria. Her injustice had indeed driven the Curate to attempt suicide. But she, so far from intending this, could she have known what was passing, would have rushed to save him! Weighted with as many stones as he could carry, the Curate proceeded towards the lake, to execute his fell purpose. But there was another concealed witness, whom the Curate and Blackadder were too much engrossed to observe. The Curate had made half the distance between the heap of stones and the lake, when he felt his arms suddenly clasped from behind. He looked round, and found himself in the embrace of—*his Mother!*"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CRISIS!—A MOTHER'S LOVE!—A FRIEND IN
NEED!

THE opportune presence of Mrs. Weatherall at this critical moment, may thus be explained. As already stated, she had her misgivings of Blackadder's visit. Some mothers would have gratified their curiosity by eavesdropping. But Mrs. Weatherall was a Christian lady. She would not condescend to this method of satisfying her anxiety, as to the purport of the long confidential communication between Blackadder and her son. She noticed William's restlessness all the evening, and on the following morning. He sat down to table, and made a mere pretence of eating his dinner.

"You eat nothing, my son. Are you unwell?"

"No, quite well; at least I have a little headache. Nothing of consequence."

After dinner, he fidgetted about, without settling down to any occupation. About half-past two, he took his hat, and prepared to go forth. His mother abruptly asked him where he was going? He looked confused. The question was repeated.

"Oh!" he replied, "I am going nowhere in particular. Only for a walk."

"But where, my son? In what direction?"

He made an evasive reply.

"Are you going to Laxington Park?"

He started and said:

"Why? What should take me there?"

"What, indeed! You have never entered the Park since the 1st of May. Then, I presume, you are not going there?"

"Oh, no. Certainly not."

His mother's suspicions were now fully roused.

"Let me accompany you, my son."

"I cannot."

"Why not?"

"Mother, I want to be alone—to meditate. Good-bye, Mother."

He departed alone. But the old lady had decided on her line of action. She was active for her age. She could walk as fast as the Curate, in his present state of debility. She went into her dressing-room. And being an *old* lady, took only *three*, instead of *thirty* minutes at her toilet. A *fact*, incredible as it will appear! Within *five* minutes, she went forth, shawled and bonneted. She followed her son. As she expected, he went to the Park! She had no difficulty in keeping him in sight. From a distance, she saw the interview between her son and a lady, whom Mrs. Weatherall

rightly conjectured to be Lady Honoria. The brief interview came to an end. Mrs. Weatherall was too far off, to know its purport; but she concluded it was not favourable. Her son had proceeded to the interview with an elastic gait. He returned with a tottering, stumbling step, like one who has received a heavy blow; and bereft of all hope. Nevertheless, his mother did not join him. She did not wish him to know that he had been followed. She contented herself with tracing his wandering steps, under the impression, that he was proceeding homewards. Suddenly, she saw him deviate from his direct route, and approach the lake. A new fear arose in the Mother's heart! She hurried to the spot. But before coming up, to her great relief, she saw her son leave the lake. She slackened her pace, for she now made sure she had needlessly alarmed herself. Still observing him, she saw him stop near the heap of stones. She had left her spectacles at home. She was not near enough to discern what he was doing. But as she saw him stooping over the stones, she had her suspicions. These were confirmed, when she saw him returning in the direction of the lake. Maternal love lent her wings. She intercepted her son midway, between the heap of stones and the lake! I have now fully accounted for the unexpected appearance of the Curate's Mother, at the moment of her son's impending suicide.

The Curate looked at his Mother with a vacant stare. He seemed, indeed, hardly to recognise her. He then attempted to proceed towards the lake. She clung to him, out of breath, by her recent exertion in overtaking him. When able to speak, she exclaimed :

“ William, don’t you know your Mother? My son! My son! What are you about to do? What is the matter with you, my dear William?”

He answered : “ The matter? Oh, nothing much. Only I am tired of life. That’s all, Mother. ‘ *Vanitas vanitatum ; Omnia vanitas !* ’ I have been preaching that doctrine for many years. Now, for the first time I know it. I realise it, as Mr. Spry says ”

His mother was shocked, frightened, terrified, as much at his manner, as at the matter of his answer. He did not look surprised, confused, or conscience-stricken.

“ Tired of life ! ” she echoed.

“ Yes, Mother, very tired. You are much older than I. Are you never tired of this fitful fever we call life ? ”

“ William ! come home with me.”

“ Home ! ” he repeated. “ Earth is not our home. We are but strangers and pilgrims, here.”

“ Dear William, come home.”

“ Where’s that ? ” he said vacantly. “ *She* will not be there. Home !—with out *her* ! ”

"I shall be there. William, don't you know your Mother?"

"Mother! Oh, yes. Well good-bye, once more." Again he moved forward.

"William! my son! my son! I entreat—I pray—I *command* you, if you love me, by your vow to honour and obey your parents—come home with me."

"No, Mother, I am sorry to disobey you, but we part here," he said firmly.

"No nearer—no nearer to that dreadful water," she exclaimed.

"Dreadful water! did you say? Look how it sparkles in the sunbeams! Oh how beautiful! It reminds me of those beautiful lines, from the German of Schiller, in his William Tell! Do you remember them, Mother?"

His mother remembered the lines well. But she hoped, by diverting his thoughts, to gain time, and turn him from his purpose. So, with praiseworthy fraud, she replied:—"No, my son, I have forgotten them. Pray repeat them to me."

"I will, Mother. I will repeat them *con amore*. Never were lines more appropriate to time, place, and situation. You shall hear them for the last time. Listen, and remember them, when I am gone. I have been complimented upon my German pronunciation." The Curate repeated with pathos, the exquisitely beautiful lines beginning:—

"Es lehelt der See, er ladet zum Bade."

Some faint idea of their beauty, is conveyed in the following translation.

“FISHER-BOY SINGS IN HIS BOAT.

“The clear smiling lake wooed to bathe in its deep,
A boy on its green shore had laid him to sleep ;

Then heard he a melody

Flowing and soft,

And sweet as when Angels

Are singing aloft.

And as thrilling with pleasure, he wakes from his rest,
The waters are murmuring over his breast ;

And a voice from the deep, cries,

With me, thou must go,

I charm the young sleeper

I lure him below.”

“There !” he exclaimed. “I think I never recited them better. That is because I never felt their force and truth so perfectly before.”

“They are very musical and flowing, William. But I confess I do not quite understand them. You must translate them, when we get home. You shall explain them to me, as we go. Come !”

“I am not going home. There is no home longer for me on earth. Stay me not, dear mother, from such a Euthanasia. Drowning is such an easy death. One plunge into these dark deep still waters—and all is over.”

“No, my son, all is not over.”

“I cannot live, mother. *She* thinks I shot her on purpose !”

“Does she ? And will you let her remain in that error ? Oh no, my son, *live, live*, to let her know the truth.”

"I cannot, Mother, I cannot. If you but knew—if you could know, how weary I am of everything! When I am dead she will know all—and then she will do justice to my memory, and pray for my soul——"

"Your soul! Oh yes—my son, think—of your *soul*—lost, for ever lost—if you commit this crime. For all other crimes, there is pardon—yes even for the *murderer*—for he has time to repent—but the *suicide*—the *self-murderer* cuts himself off from repentance. He disdains, repudiates the infinite mercy of God!"

"Farewell, Mother, farewell!" he exclaimed, struggling to free herself from her tenacious grasp.

"Farewell! do you say! Think my child, that is a *prayer*. And can you go to self-destruction, with a prayer? Oh kneel with me, and we will pray together. We have too much neglected prayer of late."

"Mother! I wished to spare you this parting pang. But what must be, must be—— Let me go."

"Never—my son—never. If you will drown yourself, you shall drown your mother also. We will live, or die together." Then uplifting her eyes, she ejaculated this brief pathetic prayer. "Merciful Father! restore my son to his right mind. If we must perish, reunite us in Heaven, for Christ's sake, Amen."

As if strengthened, and inspired by this

appeal for superhuman help, the resolute old lady renewed her grasp upon her son, and locked her hands together with all her remaining force. It was the last conscious effort of Maternal Love! The madman actually dragged her forward some yards. Fortunately her rigid hold did not relax. She fainted, and hung a dead weight upon him. This brought him partially to himself. He beheld his Mother lying before him, and thought he had killed her! He knelt down, and called her by every endearing name. Oh how sweetly would his words have sounded to her a few minutes before! Now, she heard them not. He gently released himself from her hold, and laid her flat upon the grass. Then, he rushed towards the lake. But not as before, with the wild fire of madness in his eyes. Not to destroy himself—but to save his Mother! He returned, with his hat full of water, knelt down beside her, and began to bathe her face. In the lapse of a few minutes, which seemed to him an age of anguish, she gave some signs of returning consciousness. She opened her eyes, and saw her son bending over her. But she was not yet quite herself. She imagined that the bitterness of death was past. She murmured incoherent words: “In my Father’s house are many mansions.”

“Mother! dear Mother! do you not know me?”

“You are like William. Can it be possible? Are we both saved?”

“Mother, I am William. I am your son.”

“I believe you are. But will you not leave me again?”

And instinctively she tried to throw her arms round him again. She dreaded lest he had not relinquished his purpose of self-destruction. With the return of memory, the Mother's first thought was for her Son.

“Fear not, dear Mother. Pardon my violence. I was not altogether myself.”

“William, my dear son! What comfort to hear you speak and look like yourself! And you will come home with your mother now, dear William?”

“Yes, Mother, when you are strong enough to walk.”

“Oh let us go at once. Let us get away from here.” She shuddered, as she looked at the lake, and added: “There seems to be here an actual embodied evil spirit hovering about us!”

Little did she imagine that she spoke the literal truth. Perceiving her uneasiness, the Curate assisted his mother to rise, and with his help she moved slowly away. The Son supported the Mother, whose timely interposition had saved his life. She still clasped his arm with both hands, as if she feared a relapse of his mania, until the dreaded lake was out of sight. Both seemed to breathe more freely, when it was no longer in view. They appeared to have left behind them, some evil influence.

Blackadder had witnessed this affecting scene, with no other emotions than those relating to his own personal safety. When meditating murder, little did he suspect the presence of a concealed observer! Had he carried out his intention of drowning the Curate, the deed might have been done, before his Mother could interfere to prevent it. And in that case, a double murder would have been required, to destroy the *witness* who would otherwise have consigned Blackadder to the gallows. The Atheistic chain of reasoning, which proved the Curate's murder a positive duty, took no account of this contingency! Blackadder relieved his feelings, by this soliloquy: "A narrow escape all round! Regular touch and go. If the old lady had been a little later, or less game, the Curate would now have been sleeping in his watery grave, as the penny-a-liners call it. He would have known the great secret. Pious people would call this Providential. If that tiger-cat has really given him the sack, the poor cuss had better have drowned himself. Well, he's spared for further trouble—that's one comfort. That was a happy thought, my telling her her lover shot her in the face, to spoil her beauty; to put his own private mark upon her, to depreciate her matrimonial marketable value, and make her a reserved lot! She swallowed that slick. What is there an angry woman won't swallow, against the person she hates for the time? That's

what made her rile up so. However, she can't continue to believe it. For she's no fool. And perhaps I forgot my usual caution, and let out a little too much for my own good. She may make it rather hot for me. She knows I tried to shoot her lover that was. But unless she makes up with the Curate, she's not likely to take any steps against me, for that matter. I have only to make myself scarce, and it will all blow over. But she is likely to do something to prevent her father's ruin, and so disappoint my plans and expectations. She may swallow the *truth*, as well as the *falsehood*. And if she believes the truth I told her, about her Noble father's covering his swindling, by selling her to her cousin ; she is just the girl to make the Earl put the Estate out to nurse, and live in a cottage, till all encumbrances are cleared off. I was a fool to blab. But the way she kept her temper, nearly drove me wild. I wonder what will be the next move in the game ? ”

So this embodiment of the Evil Principle quietly withdrew, to meditate more mischief.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Weatherall and her son walked slowly home. He was truly penitent, and touched by his narrow escape, owing to his Mother's providential interference. He told her all, without the slightest reserve. Every word spoken by Lady Honoria, was burned into his memory. Then, his Mother was no longer surprised that he had gone temporarily mad, and attempted suicide.

She rejoiced to know that her son's attempt at self-destruction was no deliberate act. She was naturally indignant with Lady Honoria's cruel injustice to "William." Mrs. Weatherall contrasted this vulgar outbreak of feminine fury, with Lady Honoria's usual good breeding, and perfect self-control, during their only personal interview, when the Mother pleaded for her Son. The shrewd old lady connected Lady Honoria's extraordinary treatment of the Curate, with Blackadder's visit, and correctly concluded, that he had tampered with, and abused her mind. It must have been Blackadder who had suggested to Lady Honoria, that "William" had purposely wounded her. She never could have imagined such a thing, of herself. But why should Blackadder so pervert her mind? To injure "William" of course, and possibly to remove suspicion from the real cause of the accident—the person who threw the cracker. That person, Mrs. Weatherall believed, to be Blackadder himself! She had all along, wondered that the thrower of the cracker, could not be traced, and apprehended, notwithstanding the handsome reward offered. The delinquent must have been disguised. Mrs. Weatherall was convinced he could be no other than Blackadder! She however confined her suspicions and convictions to herself. There was no proof to connect Blackadder with the throwing of the fire-work. No one had recognised him as

being present, among the crowd beyond the ha-ha. And as for Lady Honoria's ebullition of temper, Mrs. Weatherall judged it all for the best, to leave "William" under the impression, that her ladyship had spoken her deliberate convictions, and said her final word. "Lady Honoria has dismissed him now, once and for ever. She might have done it more gently, more like a lady. But after all, her cruelty may be kindness. She has shown herself at last, in her true colours. She has taught William a lesson, he is not likely to forget. She can never again, take him from me, deceive him, and wound his feelings. It may be all for the best. Absence and change of scene, will cure him of his hallucination."

This was not very consistent with what Mrs. Weatherall had said, in her son's peril, about disabusing Lady Honoria's mind, of the falsehood instilled by Blackadder. Possibly also, the Curate was not altogether sorry, that their unsettled affairs held out no prospect of immediate departure. For now, that the more immediate peril was over, mother and son had to confront the fact of their indebtedness, which had been temporarily forgotten. They were closely watched by their creditors. Any attempt to get away, would be misrepresented as absconding. They were worried by dunning letters. These contained insolent demands for immediate payment, and insinuated the

basest motives for delay. One creditor even threatened an execution. But the Curate knew this to be a mere *brutum fulmen*. He defied the creditor to enter his Mother's house, and levy on her goods, for her son's debt. Nevertheless, he was deeply distressed at these repeated taunts, of being a fraudulent debtor. His sensitive nature felt such mean petty insults, keenly. Just as repeated pin-pricks are more intolerable, than one severe sword-wound. And he felt the truth of his mother's observation, that a complete change was necessary for both. Perhaps some critical reader may here observe: "The Curate had been an exemplary worker in Laxington for three years. Notwithstanding the indiscretions of the last six months; was there no one in Laxington, to befriend the poor man in his difficulties? Do the exigencies of the story, imperatively require the Novelist to libel human nature? Was the Curate to be disgraced, ruined, and utterly crushed, without sufficient cause?" No; sensible reader! Many pitied, whose means did not permit them to help. On one night, fortune seemed to have done her worst. The Curate seriously proposed to end the struggle, by becoming a bankrupt, and giving up all to his creditors. There was a knock at the street door. Mr. Stedfast was announced, and entered. After the usual preliminary courtesies, their M.P. plunged in *medias res*.

"My worthy friends, if you will permit me

to call you so, let me throw ceremony aside. Mr. Weatherall, I met you for the first time, at the Earl of Laxington's, at a quiet dinner, last November. We were all treated as mutual friends. You know how freely my parliamentary prospects were discussed there. I believe your influence obtained me many votes, though you may not have directly canvassed for me."

"I can assure you, I did not. My political views are, I believe, very similar to yours. I read and liked your speech very much. But as a matter of principle, I abstain from canvassing, and all interference with elections. A political parson weakens his own influence, and damages the cause of Religion!"

"Sir, I thoroughly agree with your sentiments. I honour and respect you all the more, for your candid avowal of them. And now, I come to the object of my visit. I have only recently heard of your difficulties. For, as you may imagine, my parliamentary duties require my presence in London. And do you know I am very angry with you, and I have come to scold you. Yes, sir, to scold you, that you have not treated me as a friend."

"In what way?" began the Curate.

"By not reposing confidence in me. Why did you not call, or write, or in some way let me know that you were in temporary difficulties? A pretty thing indeed for our Curate to be in trouble, and for your M.P. to

be the last to hear of it. And now look here. Will you make up for lost time? Act like a man of the world. Give me the schedule of your liabilities. Leave me to deal with your creditors."

"You are very kind, Mr. Stedfast. I am deeply grateful for your sympathy. But it will be useless for you to trouble yourself."

"Useless! how so?"

"My creditors refuse to give me time. I have asked it from them in vain. Nothing but hard cash will satisfy them. *That* I have not to give. So I have determined to become a bankrupt. Nothing but foolish worldly pride, has hindered me from deciding on this before. I shall go to Lawyer Ferret to-morrow."

"First, consult with Lawyer Stedfast to-night. Lawyer Ferret will charge you for advice. I will charge nothing. Let me see what I can do with these unreasonable people, these daughters of the horse-leech, who cry 'Give, Give.' I will make them take off at least twenty-five per cent. for ready money."

"Ah, my dear sir. Even then, the sum is altogether beyond me. And they refuse to grant time, and receive their money by instalments."

"You owe, then, a large sum?"

"A very large sum. I cannot think how I could manage to run up such an amount in four or five months."

"Perhaps you have been overcharged. But

what is the gross amount? Tell me the sum total."

"Two hundred and fifty pounds."

Mr. Stedfast arched his eyebrows, and gave a whistle. The Curate construed these signs into expressions of astonishment, at the vastness of the debt. "It is an immense sum. I thought you would think so. I have been very extravagant. I deserve to suffer."

"Why no, my young friend. A man cannot frequent the best County society, and hunt, without spending money."

"True, Mr. Stedfast. But my horses cost me nothing. They were lent me by the Earl."

"I know; but there are many incidental expenses. I fancy you misconceived me just now. I expressed astonishment at the amount of your debt, not because it is so large; but because it is so small. To tell you the truth, I thought you owed twice or thrice as much. Let me see;" said the worthy M.P., taking out his note book, and making a memorandum. "Debt £250, less discount, say 25 per cent., leaves £187 10s. This seems a large sum to you, Mr. Weatherall. To me it is a trifle. Leave the payment to me, and I will consider you as my banker, till it is convenient to settle."

The Curate stared at Mr. Stedfast, as if hardly understanding his offer. Recent bitter experience made it difficult to credit such generosity. Mrs. Weatherall thanked their

benefactor, between irrepressible sobs. The worthy man was gratified at such genuine indications of real gratitude. Who is not? It is surely much pleasanter to help those who thank you, than those who do not! Mr. Stedfast's delicacy led him to cut short his visit, and leave Mother and Son by themselves. "Consider your pecuniary difficulties at an end. I will see you as soon as I have discharged these debts." He then received from the Curate, a schedule specifying the several claims of his creditors, and departed. Three days afterwards, Mr. Stedfast called again, and produced a sheaf of receipts. He had settled all claims for £180. To quiet the Curate's conscience, Mr. Stedfast received his note of hand for that amount. He then partook of some refreshment, and talked over the Curate's prospects. Mr. Stedfast highly approved of their determination to go to London. Change of scene and occupation, he thought highly beneficial. Meantime, he promised to use his influence to obtain for Mr. Weatherall, another curacy, and if possible, a benefice. Mother and son found it difficult to thank their Friend with words. The hearts of both were too full. Tears were more eloquent. "We had no claim on you," at length Mrs. Weatherall made shift to say;

"Had you not? You have three claims on me."

"How so?"

"Firstly, the claim of distress. I am quite a

virtuoso in pleasures. I will have none but the very best. I have lived long enough, to know there is none equal to the pleasure of doing good. I am rather tired of all others. But one never tires of *that*. Secondly, there is gratitude. I am your debtor for many excellent sermons."

"And what, pray, is the third claim?"

"Oh!" replied Mr. Steadfast jocosely, "that is a purely selfish one. I hold your son's acknowledgment for £180. The sooner he gets a living, the sooner he will repay me. So much for the third claim."

The Curate was now a free man, able to leave Laxington, when he pleased. Mrs. Weatherall looked anxiously forward to the time of "flitting." She urged on preparations for departure. Her now repentant Son fell in with her views. He was eager, so far as possible, to compensate his dear Mother, for all her sufferings, during his infatuation for a woman, who had driven him to despair. A portion of the furniture was sold by auction. The rest was packed. Farewell visits were paid. All their affairs were settled. By the end of July, "the Wild Curate" had quitted Laxington. He was regretted by the poor, and by all who knew how to make allowances for youthful errors; especially when springing from no base indulgence, but from a strong and ardent attachment! He was missed after he had gone. Public Opinion began to veer round to the conviction, that he had been

hardly used. He was spoken of as "one more sinned against, than sinning." Mrs. Weatherall and her Son were comfortably settled in lodgings, in a London suburb. There, I shall leave them for the present, and return to Laxington House.



BOOK SIXTH.

AFTER LONG YEARS.



CHAPTER I.

ARISTOCRATS WITH HEARTS ! —“ TONY LUMPKIN ”
WITH—AND WITHOUT HIS MOTHER !

WHATEVER Democrats say or think, an Aristocrat may possess a heart. A Patrician papa may love his child quite as much, as a Plebeian father. As a matter of fact, cruelty to children is a feature of the lower, rather than of the higher orders. Two of our “ Rulers,” both men of the People, once had a difference of opinion on this subject. The Conservative working-man, said that a certain Earl left a widower, did really mourn his deceased wife ! The Radical (from his intimate personal knowledge of the Nobility) said that no Aristocrat possessed a heart. *Ergo*, that the Earl did not regret his wife, and only shed crocodile tears. “ Conservatives are the stupid party ! ” The Conservative working-man ought immediately to have “ caved in,” and eaten humble pie. Unfortunately for himself, the silly fellow still stuck to his conviction, that the Earl grieved for his wife. Whereupon, the Radical had recourse to the striking Caucus’ argument of

physical force, and knocked down his companion!

As may be supposed, the Earl of Laxington had taken seriously to heart, the terrible accident to his beloved only child. The Earl loved Lady Honoria as much, and (making allowance for difference of the period) probably with as little discretion, as Squire Western loved Sophia. The loss of Lady Honoria's left eye was a dreadful misfortune. Yet fears had been entertained for Lady Honoria's life and reason. Compared with either of those calamities, the loss of an eye, seemed almost trivial. The fond father did his best to comfort and console his afflicted daughter. He urged her to go out, and take exercise with him, lest her health should suffer from confinement to the house. Lady Honoria refused at first, but afterwards, consented, solely to gratify her father. There was indeed danger of the young lady sinking into a settled melancholy, which might have ended in confirmed mania, or consumption. Her father rendered excellent service, by rousing his child. He implored her, with tears, to preserve her life for his sake. Lady Honoria had been heard to wish for death! For a time, she seemed to court it, as a Friend. But the sight of her father's tears, restored her to a better frame of mind. She perceived then that she was not resigned, but selfish, and undutiful. One day, she said: "You wish me to live, papa?"

“ My love, what a question ! ”

“ You would grieve, if I should die ? ”

“ Honoria ! Do not talk so strangely. My life is bound up in yours. You are all I have to live for. If I should lose you, I could not long outlive my only child. My grey hairs would soon go down in sorrow to the grave.”

How natural it is, to quote our grand old Saxon translation of the Scriptures. Texts come to our lips, in trouble, sorrow, heaviness, and whenever we are in earnest. The Sacred Volume is constantly quoted, not merely by Christians, and by Nothingarians ; but by Infidels, professing to agree with Mrs. Law, who calls the Bible, the worst book in the World.* Even Secularists search the Scriptures ; read the Bible to pick holes in it. And in lucid intervals, forget prejudice so far as to quote its venerable words. What a high compliment, involuntarily paid by Unbelievers, to the Book, by attacking which, they get a living !

“ Dear papa, I believe you do love me—”

“ You only *believe* ! Did you ever doubt I loved you, Honoria ? ”

“ No, no papa, I did not mean that. I know you love me. You have proved it in your whole life—especially in one thing.”

“ What is that, love ? ”

“ In not giving me a step-mother.”

* Mrs. Law on the Bible. “ The Secular Review ” reports a lecture by Mrs. Law, at Glasgow, on “ The Bible the Worst Book in the World.”—“ Shield of Faith,” April, 1879.

“ Oh, that is nothing.”

“ Yes, it is a great deal. Few men, with your advantages of person and rank, would have remained a widower for sixteen years. You have done so, for love of me. I know what I know, papa.”

The Earl jocularly replied : “ Do you allude to a recent temptation to change my condition ? I really think Miss Wildgoose would have done me the honour to accept me, had I proposed to her.”

Lady Honoria smilingly replied : “ I have no doubt she would ! It is fortunate for you, papa, that the Movement for Women, does not *yet* authorise them to propose directly to men ! Or, you might certainly have had to choose the alternative of accepting, or refusing Miss Wildgoose. No ; I was not at all afraid of *her*. With all her cant about elevating our sex to her own high standard of manners, and morals, she is a regular tuft-hunter and worldling. I knew you would see through her. But now, dear papa, to speak of myself. I begin to think myself a very selfish young woman. Here, have you been giving up your life to me. And I—what return have I made ? ”

“ You have brightened and beautified my home. You have made my life as happy as it was possible to be, since I lost your Mother.”

“ Ah, papa, your love can see no failings in me. But since my accident—I, forsooth, must sit down and think wholly of myself,

and the loss of an eye ; as though there were no other troubles or sorrows in the world, but mine. And worse than all. I forgot my duty to my own dear papa, who has been both father and mother to me."

The Earl caught her to his heart, and said with a broken voice : " Oh, my child, you have your Mother's spirit. Your words make me so happy."

" Well, papa, I am going to turn over a new leaf. I will no longer sit for hours alone, and mope, and be miserable. We are now all-in-all to each other. I love no one but you. I will try and live for your sake."

" Bless you, Honoria. Shall I ring, and order the horses ? Shall we ride or drive ? Or perhaps, you would prefer to walk ?"

" Whichever you please, dear papa. I have no choice."

" Nay, Honoria, you will please me better, by choosing."

" Well then, papa, I think I prefer walking ! I want to gather some wild flowers."

This mental change in his daughter, made the Earl very happy. Only one remark grated on his ear ; the statement " I love no one but you." One good result had come from his daughter's terrible accident—The Wild Curate's disgrace ! The Earl's family pride had been highly offended, at the slightest allusion to the bare possibility, that Lady Honoria seriously encouraged the Curate. That flirtation was all over now. The Curate

had left Laxington. Lady Honoria and he would probably never meet again. Why, then, did her words—"I love none but you!" grate on the Earl's ear? Because he had quite made up his mind, that Lady Honoria was to marry her cousin, and so, remain mistress of the paternal estate!

Under this impression, the Earl had burthened the property to an extent which would compel the young couple to practise strict economy, for some years after marriage. A practical man of the world, is only surpassed in corruption, by a woman of the world! As a man of the world, the Earl saw nothing very wrong in his conduct. It was only a way of binding the bargain. But during the process of dismissing Blackadder, the transaction was, for the first time, represented in plain, unceremonious language. On that memorable occasion, the Earl had been compelled, for once in his life, to see himself as others saw him. That glimpse of his own likeness, had so utterly shocked the Earl, that, as we know, he actually swooned! And now, he was tormented by misgivings, as to whether his nephew would stand to his bargain. The young gentleman had never made his appearance at Laxington House, since the accident. Common decency required him to call, when all the County families frequently came, and sent to enquire after Lady Honoria. Of course, he had written condoling letters, in which he hinted at the reason of absenting himself.

His nature was so sensitive, that he could not bear to see Lady Honoria suffering. So, he preferred not to see her at all! The Earl knew this was not the conduct of an ardent lover, and very much feared lest it foreboded the miscarriage of his settled plans. He therefore determined to ask his nephew, to pay a visit to Laxington House. Then and there, would be decided an important question: Whether the nephew would become the uncle's son-in-law, pleasantly, without any difficulty; or, possibly, through a hint of prosecution for breach of promise! The young gentleman accordingly came at last. But before personally introducing him to readers, it is necessary to impart some preliminary information.

The Earl's younger brother, the Honourable Frederic Forrester, had (in the Earl's opinion) made a *mésalliance*. Mr. Forrester was not properly provided for, by being pitchforked into a political post. He could not, like other noble Barnacles, attach himself to the Ship of State. He could not slide into some snug sinecure, and slumber through life. That was his idea of serving his country. He was too stupid, and too idle, to think of enlisting in the political rank and file, and trying to work his way up, by energy and interest combined. To be sure, the Clerical profession offered a refuge to the younger branches of nobility. But it is not now, as in days before the Reformation. Then, there were monasteries

and convents, where Noble men and women could do no particular harm, even if they could do no good. "The Clerical profession offered an easy and honourable provision for younger sons of the *gentry*. Rome had provided stations for them, where, if not qualified, their sins of omission would be trivial. Monasteries had always a large proportion of such. Their lack of ability or learning brought no disgrace to themselves, and was not injurious to the great establishment of which, though an inert, they were not an inconvenient body. But when such persons, instead of entering convents which their ancestors had endowed, were settled upon family livings, as parochial clergy, then indeed a serious evil was done to the character of the Church, and to the religious feeling of the nation; their want of aptitude or inclination for the important office into which they had been thrust, then became a fearful thing for themselves, and a miserable calamity for the people committed to their charge." (Southey's "Wesley.") It is not now, as when Miss Austen wrote. How low the Church had fallen, she shows by always representing her walking gentlemen in difficulties, as studying for the Ministry. From which it appears that "young Levites," or Curates, were then recruited from a class too lazy, ignorant, helpless, and stupid, to get a living in any other profession! Fifty or sixty years earlier, the Honourable Mr. Forrester might

have been provided for in the Church, and might have obtained preferment; held two or three livings, and paid others to do his work. Latterly an idle Honourable is obliged to look in other directions.

To do the Earl justice, he had behaved liberally to his younger brother. He was offered free quarters at Laxington House, or a very handsome allowance, if he desired to live by himself. The latter alternative was accepted. But Mr. Forrester wanted a larger income. With average good looks, and an Earl's younger brother, he married a wealthy City-heiress. His marriage caused a coolness between him and his brother. The Earl could not forgive him, for tainting the blue blood of the Forresters. The alienation was to some extent toned down. The brothers occasionally met, though never on cordial terms. The Honourable Mr. Forrester left only one child—the heir at-law; his uncle's estate being entailed on heirs male. The future Earl of Laxington was to the present Earl, an important personage, in spite of the mercantile taint in his blood. Accordingly, he and his widowed mother became periodical guests at Laxington House. The Earl at length suggested to Mrs. Forrester, that the cousins should eventually marry. She was not averse to the proposed match. The wealthy heir to an Earldom, might of course expect money with, as well as blood in, a wife. Lady Honoria had no fortune. But

she was very beautiful, and would do credit to her husband, as mistress of Laxington House. The son allowed himself to be influenced by his mother. He was a gay young man, apparently of the same opinion with the Father of Protestantism, Luther, when he said:—

“Who loves not women, wine, and song,
Remains a fool his whole life long.”

To these three tastes, Mr. Forrester added a very decided taste for play, for gambling on the turf, and for all low, vulgar, brutal, and cruel sports! People who knew him best, said: He was a dissipated young cub, with no redeeming traits of character. Lady Honoria was far too good for him. She had only £200 a year. But she was a young, beautiful, witty, and accomplished woman of rank, with a host of admirers. She could have her pick of husbands. She might marry a duke, or a millionaire. And she would be simply sacrificing herself, to marry her cubbish cousin, merely to remain mistress of Laxington Estate.

Such was the state of affairs, when the accident occurred, which blemished Lady Honoria's physical beauty. Mr. Forrester had some dim sense of propriety. Believing himself engaged to his cousin, he was on the point of starting for Laxington House. He was prevented by his mother. Her vulgar purse-pride resented the Earl's family-pride.

She rebelled against his patronising manner. The play of personal pride in each, might have formed a scene worthy of that admirable comedy "The School for Arrogance."—Mrs. Forrester did not choose to go herself. And she did not care to trust that grown baby, and spoilt child, her Son, out of her sight, lest his wily old Uncle might marry him to Lady Honoria, before his return! The Earl's special invitation to her son, could not, under the circumstances, be declined. Mrs. Forrester could not very well accompany her son, without being asked: She therefore consented most reluctantly, to let Young Hopeful accept the invitation. Every possible precaution was, however, taken. He was fortified, and primed, with good instructions; and fearful threats of his Mother's anger, if he allowed himself to be circumvented by his Uncle, and cousin. The following dialogue will give some further idea of Mother and Son.

"But, Mother, what the doose am I to say, if I am cornered?"

"What do you mean by cornered, Frederic? I don't understand slang."

"Why, suppose Uncle asks me plump and plain, if I intend to fulfil my engagement about the filly."

"What *do* you mean by such language?"

"Well then—to marry my cousin? Suppose the Earl holds me to my bargain. What am I to say?"

"If I could trust you. But men are so stupid."

"Stoopid! Why, ain't we the superior sex?"

"Well then, what will you, one of the superior sex, say, if the Earl does, in your vile slang, corner you,—ask you if you intend to fulfil your engagement to marry your cousin?"

The specimen of the Superior Sex did not reply. He looked particularly foolish. His mother repeated her question. The young Machiavel was obliged to confess, That he did not know what to say. His mother had "put him into a regular hole." At last, a bright idea struck him. "Look here Mother."

"Well, I am looking."

"I know what I'll say."

"Let me hear then."

"Why, when a fella asks another fella, a plump and plain question like that, it won't do for a fella to hang fire, to beat about the bush, you know. Come now, will it?"

"If I understand your gibberish, you mean this: If your uncle asks a direct question, you think you are bound to give a direct answer. That is what you mean, put into *English*?"

"You've hit it mother. A plain question requires a plain answer. Don't it?"

"*Cela dépend.*"

"Oh bother French! Who's talkin' gibberish now? Speak English, like me, mother."

"I should have to unlearn my mother-tongue first, Frederic. Tell me first what *you* would reply."

"Well, if uncle asked me to marry cousin, I'd say, *No!*"

Mrs. Forrester had a hearty fit of laughter. Her son looked very sulky.

"I see nothing to laugh at, mother."

"No, indeed; there would be nothing to laugh at, if you gave the Earl such a silly, such an undiplomatic answer."

"Why, wouldn't that end the whole business? I couldn't speak plainer. The filly's scratched. I ain't agoin' to run her. That's all. Haven't we settled it between ourselves, that now the filly's blemished—I mean, now my cousin has lost an eye, she's no match for the future Earl of Laxington? I wouldn't back a one-eyed horse. And I don't fancy a one-eyed wife. Besides it's no longer a fair bargain. When I agreed to marry my cousin Honoria, she was a stunner—the pet of the paddock; a regular beauty; warranted sound in wind and limb. With her pedigree, I overlooked the want of tin. But now, she has neither tin nor beauty. It ain't fair to hold a fella to his bargain now; is it mother? I'm not to be frightened by talk of law and damages. Why, the filly herself is damaged."

Mrs. Forrester had spoiled her son. But her partiality could not blind her to his brutality. She was utterly disgusted and shocked at his vile vulgar horsey slang; at

his language, confounding his cousin with a mare; and treating a matrimonial engagement, like a transaction on the Turf. Mrs. Forrester said emphatically :—

“Frederic, you are incorrigible. I cannot trust you out of my sight. If you should so far forget yourself, as to use such language to the Earl, he would have you turned out of his house.”

“Oh, that’s all bosh, rubbish. I know my way about. I wasn’t born yesterday. I’m up to a thing or two. Of course what I say now, is *entry noo*, as you say in your French lingo. I’m fly. But suppose I should make a slip, the Earl would overlook it. He’d think twice, before he turned me out of *his* house. Perhaps it’s already much more *my* house than *his* !”

“I don’t question your knowledge of your own fast, disreputable world—”

“Thank you, mother !”

“But of the real world of Society, for which you will never be fit, if you go on as you are doing.”

“A fella must sow his wild oats.”

“If that means squandering your money, and destroying your constitution, in low degrading company; living with horse-jockeys, grooms, betting-men; and worse—*Je n’en vois pas la nécessité*. You have already forgotten my instructions.”

“How, mother ?”

“I told you never to give a straightforward

answer, to a compromising question. You think yourself a knowing-one, and allow yourself to be plundered by sharpers and black-legs. You are a thorough simpleton. You let people sift you, pump you, turn you inside out, like a glove. If you were clever, you would never let the Earl ask you such a question. But if he should, you must give him some evasive answer."

"And if that don't satisfy the old buffer——"

"Then refer him to me."

"That cock won't fight, mother."

"What do you mean?"

"Uncle knows I've come to years of discretion."

"Then he knows more than I do!"

"None of your chaff, mother. You twig. I'm over one-and-twenty, several years."

"Well?"

"Then I'm responsible for my own actions. I can't plead minority. So, Uncle won't stand my referring him to you. Now, I thought a plump *No* would settle the matter."

"So it might, very unpleasantly for you. You are thoroughly compromised with your cousin. You have written her letters admitting your engagement. You are liable to an action for breach of promise."

"Yes, but there's the Earl's mismanagement, mother. The Earl has been felling timber, and raising money on mortgage, and doing lots of things, he had no right to do.

Let him bring an action, if he dare. Two can play at that game."

"True; but far better not expose yourself to the chance of litigation. Suppose now, you roused Lady Honoria's pride. Suppose she refused you, and returned all your letters. Then indeed, you might come out with your plump *No*, and snap your fingers at the Earl."

"I twig, mother."

"But be on your guard, Frederic, I intreat. Be civil. Don't say anything offensive. Don't wound Lady Honoria's feelings. She is her father's daughter. She was always proud. And if I know anything of human nature, she will be ten times prouder, since this accident. She can't bear to be pitied."

"I'll bear what you say in mind, mother. I'll try and not put my foot in it."

So the Honourable departed on his delicate mission.

On hearing that Mr. Forrester was expected, Lady Honoria at first signified her intention of not seeing him. Her father expostulated with her, saying how strange her absence would appear. Lady Honoria complied, to please her father. She entered the drawing-room, only a few minutes before dinner was announced. The Honourable Mr. Forrester was a strongly-built, under-sized man of five-and-twenty; not positively ill-looking, but heavy, clumsy, and vulgar in appearance. His features were regular. He

might have been considered handsome, but for a wide mouth, and thick sensual, voluptuous lips. He did not show to advantage in the drawing-room. He was far more at home, in the society of his familiars, betting men, book-makers, jockeys, touts, &c. His dress corresponded to his tastes, being "loud" and "flashy," as regards jewellery, scarf, vest, and "continuations." This conventional Honourable was not one of Nature's noblemen. He was not prepossessing in person, manners, or conversation. He had a part to play, which would have taxed the qualities of a superior man. Mr. Forrester played it in his own characteristic fashion, like a modern "Tony Lumpkin." When Lady Honoria entered the room, Mr. Forrester showed his tact, by a very perceptible start, and an inarticulate ejaculation. Movement and utterance plainly signified: How changed you are! How that black patch does disfigure you. Lady Honoria, and the Earl, so understood the start and ejaculation. Then, Mr. Forrester advanced to shake hands with, and salute his cousin. Lady Honoria drew herself up, did not take his hand, and declined the proffered salute!

Possibly, Mr. Forrester was a little discomposed by this reception. By way of retiring gracefully from his awkwardness, and to make Lady Honoria feel at ease, he expressed a hope that she had quite recovered, and felt no ill effects from her accident. Lady Honoria

bowed coldly, and bit her lips. She did not condescend to speak. The Earl hastily said : " We endeavour to forget it. We never speak of it, unless when our friends draw our attention." Even this strong hint was not taken. Whether ignorantly, or purposely, Mr. Forrester still hovered about the forbidden subject. He asked : " Has the fella who threw that cracker, been discovered ? "

" No," said the Earl.

" He deserves transportation."

The announcement of dinner caused a diversion. Naturally, Lady Honoria disliked any allusion to her disfigurement. The calamity was too recent. It continually occupied her thoughts. Friends carefully avoided the delicate subject. They endeavoured to look and speak, as if Lady Honoria had suffered no diminution of beauty. Imagine then, how keenly she felt the consciousness, that her cousin's first sight of her, since her accident, caused a shock which he could not conceal ! Still more intolerable was the air of pity, sympathy, and commiseration which he assumed. Lady Honoria had been accustomed to banter, and make game of him. She had been wont to titillate his dull wit, and to draw him out, for the amusement of herself and others. And now, she had sunk to be an object for his pity ! This reflection was gall and wormwood to her proud spirit. She was barely civil to her cousin, during dinner. She was unable to conceal her mortification,

under a show of stoicism which she did not feel. And it taxed all her good breeding, to refrain from being positively rude to Mr. Forrester. Nevertheless, to please her father, she remained at table, till the cloth was drawn. Then she left the gentlemen to their *tete-à-tete*.

The butler opened a fresh bottle, and retired, at a sign from his master. The Earl began to speak on the subject nearest his heart. With another man, he might have displayed more tact. He thought delicacy superfluous with his nephew.

“If I construe correctly your start of surprise, when Lady Forrester entered the drawing-room, you find her very much changed?”

This was a home question. Mr. Forrester was far from being intoxicated, *then*. But the wine he had swallowed, had loosened his tongue, relaxed the guard of reason, and made him oblivious of his mother’s prudent advice. He intimated that he did think Lady Honoria very much changed. That, prepared as he was, the reality far exceeded imagination. This blunt affirmative deeply offended the Earl. He had evidently expected a far more complimentary reply, if not an apology, for his nephew’s rudeness. The Earl drily observed: “It is a very superficial nature which is seriously affected by any blemish in mere material beauty.”

Not exactly comprehending this, but taking

it as uncomplimentary to himself, the nephew merely said: "Haw!"

The Earl continued: "Some women have nothing but beauty to recommend them. But Lady Forrester has a reserve of mental and moral qualities, which render her quite independent of personal beauty and wealth."

Mr. Forrester better understood this remark, and replied: "I see what you're driving at. Nevertheless, beauty and money are two very good things with a wife."

The Earl slightly shrugged his shoulders, as he said: "I will not affect to misunderstand you, Mr. Forrester. But as you have already made your choice, I hope you do not intend to reflect on your future wife's calamity, or want of fortune."

Mr. Forrester had often been nettled at the Earl's patronising manner, and at his daughter's badinage. The young gentleman had chafed under his mother's lecture. He now determined to get out of leading-strings. He would show he could walk alone, and manage his own affairs. Matters were now approaching a crisis. Upon the answer to this crucial question, would depend whether the uncle, or the nephew would conquer. Moreover, our "Tony Lumpkin" was beginning to wax pot-valiant. For, as he said: "When I am a little *on*, I can talk to anybody." He therefore refilled his glass, made a libation on the mahogany, pushed the bottle to his host, and said: "I don't in

any way reflect on Lady Forrester's calamity, or want of fortune. But the truth's the truth. Beauty and money are two very good things in a wife. It's impossible for a fella to marry, and live in Society, without one or other."

"Am I to infer that if you had your choice yet to make, you would not do me the honour to fix your affections on my daughter?"

If the Earl was fishing for a compliment, he was doomed to disappointment. His nephew replied: "Well, my lord, your plain question shall have an equally plain answer. Frankly and candidly, I would not."

This brutal reply had the effect of a shot between wind and water. The cub deserved to be kicked. But he was the Earl's guest, and nephew. The Earl paused, and altered his tactics. Dropping his former ceremony, he adopted the familiar style of kindred.

"Is it possible, Nephew, that this unlucky accident can have caused so great a change in your sentiments towards your cousin? You once thought her a prize. Can the loss of an eye, make such a difference? Consider—such an accident might happen after marriage. Would you then be justified in removing your affections from your wife? Ought it not rather to increase your sympathy and regard?"

"After marriage, is a very different matter, uncle. A fella is booked then, and can't help

himself. But before marriage; that's a horse of another colour. Why does a fella fall in love with a beautiful woman? Why, because he can't help it. But why does he want to marry a beautiful woman, without tin—without fortune, I mean? A beautiful woman is not always a pleasant companion. She's like a skittish, high-tempered mare—doosed difficult to manage. Takes a deal of looking after. Apt to shy, and bolt. Full of tricks, if she's free from vice. But then, there's the pleasure of carrying off a fine woman from all her admirers. Now, before the accident, Cousin Honoria was as beautiful a woman as ever I saw. Perfect in all points, both face and figure; magnificent action—splendid stepper—Then as you say, she has other qualities of which I don't pretend to judge. But I do know something about horse-flesh, and female beauty."

"Your cousin is still beautiful. The loss of an eye cannot make such a difference——"

"Not in your eyes, Uncle. That's natural. But take my cousin up to town, before the Season's over. You'll soon find out that the loss of an eye makes all the difference in the world. Cousin Honoria might have had her choice among tip-top swells, before. Now, she won't get a single proposal."

Custom and prejudice have cast a pharisaic veil over our system of selling women in marriage. A rude shock is necessary to open our mental vision, to all the meanness and de-

gradation of the British Matrimonial Market. Here was an English peer, proud of his family, really loving his daughter, and anxious to make her happy. Yet the Earl actually condescended to chaffer and higggle about the disposal of his daughter, to a vicious young rake, who looked, spoke, and thought, like his own stud-groom! As regards personal merits, the Earl would as soon have thought of giving his daughter to the stud-groom, as to his nephew, had he not been heir-at-law to title and estate. It is astonishing what mean things honourable men and women do, if only wrapped up sufficiently, to hide the real nature of the transaction. Well might the Delphic Oracle propose, as the first human duty—"Know Thyself!" Happily for the Earl and his daughter, in this case, the disguise was rudely torn aside. The low vulgar brutality of his nephew sickened him, and made him lose his temper. Yet, strange to say—or perhaps not—the Earl saw clearly his nephew's utter want of conventional propriety; but not his own meanness in selling his daughter to such a man! The Earl's present thought was to persist in his pet project, and to compel his nephew to fulfil his engagement. In a tone of withering sarcasm, the Earl observed.

"Proceed sir. I am all attention. How many more excuses will you find, for not fulfilling your engagement to my daughter? The matter is as interesting, as the manner."

“Tony Lumpkin” was now on his mettle. He was not without a share of mother-wit.

“Well, my lord, I don’t think it quite fair to blame it all on to me. You saw how Cousin Honoria received me to-day. She wouldn’t even take my hand. Lady Honoria made it quite plain, she don’t care for me.”

“Lady Honoria will obey her father, sir. You know you are engaged, and have mutually corresponded for years, on that footing. It is too late now to change your mind.”

“It is not too late for my cousin to change her mind! That is, if she ever fancied me, which I very much doubt. She always chaffed, and laughed at me. But to-day she would hardly look at, or speak to me.”

“No matter, Mr. Forrester. You were quite willing to marry your cousin. You were over age, when you engaged yourself to her. I now demand your fulfilment of that engagement. If you refuse, you know the penalty.”

“Now, look here Uncle, I am not to be bullied into marrying a woman, who shows plainly, she don’t care for me. I’m no Welsher. What’s fair and square I’ll do. You saw her behaviour to me to-day. Will you leave the decision to Cousin Honoria herself?”

This was a reasonable proposal. Had the Earl accepted it, the contract would have been broken, or fulfilled, exactly as he left his daughter free, or forced her inclinations.

Left free, Lady Honoria would have rejected her cousin, whom she never loved, had always despised, and now loathed! Yet, had her father insisted on the sacrifice, she would have yielded. The Nephew's proposition left it in the Uncle's power, to force the cousins to marry, and be miserable. Fortunately, the Earl was too angry to accept the proposition. He exclaimed :

“ No sir—the law shall decide between us.”

“ So be it. The law shall decide. I flatly refuse to marry a woman, now without beauty, without fortune, and without love for me. If you are fool enough to bring me to book for this, I shall instruct my solicitor to bring a cross action against you, for felling timber, mortgaging, and otherwise illegally encumbering the Estate. You are only a life-renter, you know. I now tell you plainly, that if you fell another tree, you shall hear from my solicitors, Messrs. Sharpe and Stinger. So if you *will* wash our dirty linen in public, we shall have a good, large, jolly, family-wash.”

The *tete-à-tete* ended in a downright quarrel. The excuse was that both were elevated with wine. “ Nothing is more erroneous than the common observation that men, ill-natured and quarrelsome when drunk, are very worthy persons when sober. Drink in reality, does not reverse nature, or create passions which did not exist before. It takes away the guard of reason, and consequently forces us to produce

those symptoms, which many when sober, have art enough to conceal. It heightens and inflames our passions (generally that passion uppermost in our mind) so that the angry temper, the amorous, the generous, the good-humoured, the avaricious, and all other dispositions of men, are, in their cups, heightened and exposed." ["Tom Jones," Book v. Chap. 9].



CHAPTER II.

LADY HONORIA IN A NEW LIGHT!—HER FATHER'S GUARDIAN ANGEL!

THE following morning, Mr. Forrester left Laxington House, and returned to the maternal wing. The Earl sent for his solicitor. Mr. Oldstyle, a keen-looking, respectable grey-headed gentleman, listened attentively to the Earl's statement, and proceeded to raise professional objections. The shrewd old lawyer pointed out that a cross action by Mr. Forrester, would be very serious. He could hardly fail to get a verdict. Then, and in that case, the Earl would be directed to make restitution to his nephew, to the full amount of all the damage done; to plant trees, and otherwise make good the value of the timber felled; and to remove all encumbrances on the property. This would be equivalent to depriving him of his whole income, which (after deducting a mere pittance as annual allowance) must be handed over to an accountant, in trust for Mr. Forrester. The Earl would be saddled with the expenses of

two law-suits. The family solicitor likewise hinted at disclosures damaging to the Earl's reputation! Therefore, as to the action for breach of promise, he would recommend the Earl to reconsider his determination. But the Earl was obstinate. He was deeply offended with his nephew, for the slight offered to Lady Honoria, and expressed himself in very disparaging terms, of his brother's son.

"This comes of a *mésalliance*. This is the taint of the vulgar citizen blood. This is his Mother's doing. My brother should have married a lady of birth and breeding. Then, I should have had a very different nephew and heir."

"Pardon me, my lord, if I take a liberty."

"Oh, you are an old friend, and quite privileged to speak, *ex animo*."

"May I enquire why you speak so strongly against your nephew?"

"He exasperated me beyond all endurance. He behaved like a cub. I account for it, by the fact that he is not true-blooded. There is plebeian puddle in his veins."

"I suspect we all have a share of *that*! But my dear lord, will you excuse a candid question?"

"Certainly. You can't advise, without confidence."

"Why, then, do you wish him to marry your daughter, your only child, deservedly so dear to you?"

"Because he will be, if he survive me, Earl of Laxington. My daughter, as his Countess, will then be legally mistress of my estate, to which she should have been, and may be considered—morally, heiress."

"That would be an incontestable argument, if Mr. Forrester were in other respects, eligible for a son-in-law. But if you really wish the marriage to take place, you are pursuing the very method to render it impossible, by an action for breach of promise. For your nephew meets your threat of an action, by threats of a counter action."

"You are right, Mr. Oldstyle. '*Nemo mortalium omnibus horis sapit.*' My nephew mortally offended me, by presuming to slight my daughter."

"He might think better of it. But if you prosecute him for breach of promise, all hopes of accommodation are at an end."

"At least, I should have my revenge."

"That is very doubtful."

"I have his letters which prove the engagement."

"*You* have them, my lord?"

"Well, my daughter has them. It's the same thing."

"Pardon me, my lord."

"What do you mean, Mr. Oldstyle?"

"Do you proceed against Mr. Forrester, with Lady Forrester's consent?"

"Why, no," said the Earl with some confusion. "That is, not exactly. But it

will not be difficult to obtain it. He insulted her grossly, yesterday."

"You surely do not mean that Mr. Forrester intentionally insulted Lady Forrester?"

"Well, perhaps, not intentionally."

"Would you mind giving me the particulars, my lord?"

The Earl did so. Without softening them, he related all the details of his *tete-à-tete* with his nephew. The lawyer pondered awhile, and then said:—"In *re*, Mr. Forrester's address to Lady Forrester, it was in bad taste. But I can discover no intentional insult. Touching the dialogue with you, it is different. Unless I greatly err, the young gentleman came here, with the purpose of breaking off the engagement with his cousin."

"You think so?"

"Certainly."

"That makes the matter worse. He deserves the more punishment."

"There are two or three things to be considered. Firstly, you certainly played into his hands. He only followed your lead. Had you really wished to give him the opportunity he sought, you could hardly have acted differently. Excuse my plain speaking, my lord."

"I confess, I did not display my usual tact. But I was upset by the insult to my daughter. The fellow is utterly unworthy of her."

A twinkle of the Lawyer's eyes, a transient elevation of the corners of his mouth, suggested a comical wonder that his client should wish to marry his daughter, to a man whom he despised, and thought utterly unworthy of her! But the Lawyer had seen too much of the world, to be astonished at such inconsistencies! And he perceived that when the Earl had relieved his feelings, he would listen to reason. "Secondly, my lord, if you commence this action, you simply make the marriage impossible. If your nephew came here purposely to break the engagement, he will not be intimidated. Thirdly, are you sure, Lady Honoria will consent? We cannot proceed without her consent?"

"Why not? She is a minor!"

"Legally, we might, but not with any propriety or decency. My lord, I speak plainly, in your interest. Frankly and candidly then, unless Lady Honoria, of her own free will, approves of this action, *I* must decline to act. You must either abandon it, or seek another solicitor."

The Earl at length consented to send for Lady Honoria, and hear her sentiments. Mr. Oldstyle would have retired, but the Earl and Lady Honoria requested the Solicitor to remain. As an old friend, and confidential adviser, father and daughter could converse without restraint, in his presence. The worthy old lawyer stated the whole question

briefly and lucidly. They were not long in doubt, as to Lady Honoria's decision.

"Is it possible, dear papa, that you seriously contemplated prosecuting my cousin, for breach of promise of marriage?"

"My love, I did. As your legal guardian, till you are twenty-one, I acted all for the best. That is, I had your welfare at heart."

"I know that, dear papa, but what was your object, pray?"

"My object?"

"Yes, papa. What result did you hope to attain, by dragging my name before the public?"

"Why, my love, it was just possible that your cousin, might not venture to abide the issue of a trial."

"I understand. If he had, and lost, he would have been obliged to pay heavy damages?"

"Exactly," said Mr. Oldstyle.

"And my father thought that the fear of being obliged to pay £10,000, or whatever the amount awarded, would have induced my cousin to redeem his forfeited pledge to me."

"You state the case with legal exactitude," said the old lawyer, rubbing his hands. "I wish all my lady and gentlemen clients were half as logical."

"That is to say of two evils—compulsory payment of a large sum of money, and marrying me, my cousin would choose the least?"

"You put the case to some extent correctly, except in calling marriage with Lady Forrester, an *evil*," said the solicitor, with a bow of old-fashioned gallantry.

"And yet, my dear sir, my cousin evidently considers it such; or why the necessity of a legal action?"

"Correctly stated. I cannot dispute your postulate. The young gentleman is misguided. '*De gustibus, non est disputandum.*'"

"It is quite possible my cousin may consider marrying me such an evil, that he would prefer to pay heavy damages."

"That is so."

"Is it also possible that we might lose the action, and that my cousin might have no damages to pay?"

"Upon my word, my dear Lady Honoria, you think of every issue. There is positively a lady-lawyer lost in you. You might illustrate the Poet Laureate's line :

'And sweet girl graduates in their golden hair.'

"I should not make a good lawyer, Mr. Oldstyle."

"Why not, pray?"

"Lawyers are proverbially keen-sighted. I have now but one eye."

This was the first time that Lady Honoria had ever voluntarily referred to her affliction. The silence that ensued, was broken by the lawyer.

"I could hazard a shrewd guess as to the issue of this proposed action, if I saw the letters your ladyship has received from your cousin."

"They are all here." Lady Honoria held out a sealed packet.

"Why have you sealed them up?" said the Earl.

"I made them up last evening. I intended to hand the packet to my cousin, this morning. He went away so early, that I lost the opportunity."

"You intended to restore those letters to your cousin, without asking my permission?"

"I should have done so, dear papa. I feel certain you would not have refused it."

"Hum!" said the Earl, not knowing what to say.

"My dear papa, can you really, for a moment, suppose, that of my own free will, I would ever have married my cousin, after the interview of yesterday evening?"

The Earl muttered some indistinct reply, in which the word "apology" was distinguished.

"No apology, no amount of solicitation from *him*, would ever have induced me to accept his hand, of my own free will. Had *you* commanded me, indeed——"

"Well, my love, you may be right. But his letters are valuable. They distinctly prove that you were engaged."

“Most distinctly ! For that very reason he shall have them back.”

The Earl said something about “Damages” and “Revenge.”

“*Revenge !* I am deeply grateful to my cousin, for showing so plainly the alteration in his sentiments. What a terrible thing, if I had not discovered the change till after marriage ! *Damages !* No possible amount of money could compensate me, for the personal degradation of an action for breach of promise. Such things are quite beneath you and me, papa ; personally, and as members of a privileged Order. *Noblesse oblige*. An action would publish to the world, either my mortification at being abandoned ; or that my wounded affections could be solaced by money. I should declare myself either a poor, weak, hysterical woman ; or a mere mercenary monster !”

With a glance of genuine admiration, the lawyer exclaimed : “Right ! The young lady is right—perfectly right. I will maintain it. I have long thought actions for breach of promise, wrong. They should be abolished. Practically, they are confined to women as plaintiffs. Men only figure as defendants. When a woman is jilted, and sometimes when she is *not*, she brings an action against the man, and generally gets a verdict, with heavy damages. The speculation is confined almost entirely to the fair sex ; and those who engage in it, cannot be termed *soft*. A jilted man has

no such solace for his blighted affections. Public opinion is dead against an appeal to the law, by a *man*. The jury give him a verdict, with one farthing damages. Men sympathise with a jilted woman—not with a jilted man. The days of chivalry are not quite gone. Would a female jury be more equitable to the man? We doubt it. For, among all the admirable qualities of women, that of administering strict impartial *Justice* is totally absent. Women are invariably advocates, or prosecutors: capital friends, dangerous enemies: strongly for, or strongly against. Never calmly judicial. No woman ever did, or ever does, or ever will, listen to both sides, and sum up with deliberate discrimination, on the merits of the case. A lady-judge is a chimæra. Therefore, my lud——”

The Lawyer was proceeding, as if addressing a jury. Suddenly he stopped, looking a little foolish, and said: “Pray pardon me this professional dissertation, but the subject engrossed me.”

“And so,” said the Earl, “ends my cherished scheme of providing for you, Honoria.”

“My dear father, there is another subject closely connected with this—indeed inseparable from it. When I have returned this packet of letters, I have given my cousin back his liberty. Papa, do *you* owe him nothing?”

“What do you mean, Honoria?” asked the Earl, with agitation.

“Papa! is it—can it be true, that you have taken advantage of this engagement with my cousin, to do anything mean, or unfair, about the property which will be his, one day? Have you, by felling timber, or by raising money on mortgage, injured the estate to his detriment? Have you done such things, on the sufferance of your own nephew, whom you affect to despise, for his treatment of me? And have *I* been made the innocent accomplice in this questionable transaction? Have we been living for years, not merely upon borrowed money, but upon *illegally* borrowed money? Have you permitted the world to say that I knew that my disposal to my cousin in marriage, was the bribe for his condoning an actual, if not a legal, robbery?”

The Earl hid his face in his hands, and groaned aloud! For years, he had lived in dread of his mismanagement of the estate, coming to his daughter's ears. To do him justice, he had acted not merely for his own selfish profit, but from a mistaken conception of his daughter's interest. Her marriage with her cousin, might, and probably would, have rendered all explanation unnecessary. And now, the discovery that she knew all, came suddenly upon the unhappy father. He looked up, and exclaimed:

“It is hard to be reproached by my only

child. In all that I have done, I consulted only your good, Honoria."

"Papa, dear papa, I believe you. I know you meant well. I do not reproach you. I never will reproach you; but on one condition."

"What is that?"

"There must be reparation."

"Reparation!"

"Yes! Ample reparation, and without delay."

"Do you know what that involves?" said the Earl bitterly.

"Retrenchment!"

"Retrenchment, of course—not gradual and limited, but immediate and thorough;—a complete revolution in housekeeping: hounds, stud, farm, garden, hot-houses, servants; *all* must be dismissed. We must either live like rats, in this big house, or, far better perhaps—abandon it, shut it up; or let it, while we vegetate elsewhere. Retrenchment on this scale, means proclaiming to the world, that we are ruined!"

"All these sacrifices are nothing, compared to our false position, every day that we continue to live on borrowed money. None of these things that we call ours, really belong to us! We are deceivers, dishonest, fraudulent impostors! As for exposure and ruin—there can be none, if we act honestly. But we may well dread the exposure and ruin which would certainly result from a prosecution by the heir."

The Earl looked from his daughter to his solicitor. The latter said :

“Lady Honoria is perfectly right. You will do me the justice, my lord, to remember that I have frequently said substantially the same thing. I have long urged retrenchment, and a thorough adjustment of your lordship’s affairs.”

“Have you, Mr. Oldstyle?” said Lady Honoria.

“That I have. Have I not, my lord?”

“You certainly have, Mr. Oldstyle.”

“Then, Mr. Oldstyle, accept my sincere, and heartfelt thanks. They may not add to your applause of conscience; yet I tender them.”

Mr. Oldstyle bowed to Lady Honoria, and said :

“Upon my word, my lord, I did not reckon on such a valuable ally, as Lady Honoria has proved herself. I pity your nephew for what he has lost. I quite agree with you. He is utterly unworthy of such a treasure as your daughter.”

“Papa, I believe you regret the loss of all these luxuries, not on your own account, but on mine.”

“You only do me justice there, my love. I think I would have foregone them long ago. But I could not bear to see you stripped of wealth, and troops of friends.”

“I thought so: I was sure: I knew it. But dear papa, if I am happier—if we are both

happier—without them? If by these so-called sacrifices, we regain content, applause of conscience, and the esteem of the wise and good—Oh, papa, how I wish you had discerned this long, long ago!”

Mr. Oldstyle turned aside, pulled out an old-fashioned silver snuff-box, and took an elaborate pinch of snuff. The whole process, from drawing forth the box, to tapping the lid, scooping up a pinch, throwing a portion away, titillating the nose with the remainder, and replacing the snuff-box, occupied upwards of two minutes. A remarkable illustration of Lord Stanhope’s curious statistical estimate of the *time lost* in taking snuff.

In a voice husky from emotion, the Earl replied:

“I wish to heaven I had, long ago. But are you sure, my love, that you will be able to endure the heavy trial, in reality? You are buoyed up, now, by exaltation of feeling. When it comes to actual bitter experience—daily, hourly absence of those comforts, and luxuries, to which you are so accustomed, that you cannot even conceive the want of them, it may be very different.”

“Never fear for me, dear papa. Every day, we shall get more accustomed to our change of circumstances. And the alteration may not be so great, in reality, as it now seems in imagination. After all, dear papa, we shall lose little beyond useless and troublesome ceremony, fairweather *friends*, and time wasted

in morning calls, and stupid parties. We can do very well without a groom of the chambers, a butler, footmen, porters, and other superfluous servants. A housemaid, parlourmaid, and cook will suffice. Our dinners will be served *hot*. Our Welsh mutton will taste all the sweeter. To live in a house with only six or eight rooms, will seem strange at first. But after a while, our home will seem all the snugger, and more cosy. We have only to fancy ourselves confined to our own private apartments, and imagine a large *suite* of unused rooms. And if you should feel it a little dull at first, I shall be there to talk, read, sing, and play to you, and never part from my own dear papa. I am sure we shall be very happy."

"Honorina, you are my guardian angel," said the Earl in a broken voice, as he returned his daughter's embrace.

During the last few minutes, the old lawyer had pretended to be engrossed in a book, which he held upside down! After Lady Honorina's speech, he could feign no longer. His feelings overcame him. He shut the volume with a clap; threw the book down, came forward, and said:

"Upon my word, my lord, if I were blessed with such a daughter, I think I should be selfish enough, never to wish to part from her."

"You are right my old friend. It is better thus."

The Lawyer's logic effectively seconded the Daughter's appeal. He represented to the Earl, that only a temporary abdication of state was requisite. In three or four years, the Estate would recover, and all liabilities be removed. Lord Forrester could then return, and occupy his ancestral mansion, with a quiet conscience. The haunting reflection that he was defrauding his heir, would no longer pervert and poison all his enjoyments. The dread of sudden ruin would no longer impend over his head, like the sword of Damocles. The battle was fairly won. The Earl's scruples vanished. He was finally persuaded to do right. He felt a mental relief, such as he had not experienced for many years—" *Mens sibi conscia recti*"—an intimation of that reward of blessed spirits—"the peace which passeth all understanding."

The Earl's resolution, once taken, was not permitted to cool, or change. Lady Honoria seconded the solicitor, in pressing on all necessary arrangements. Indeed, the Earl himself seemed most eager to convert theory into practice. Thus, in the course of two or three months, the revolution of their house-keeping was completed. The whole expensive and princely establishment was broken up. The kennel was disposed of to a neighbouring hunt. The valuable stud sold off at Tattersall's. The numerous array of domestics, butler, footmen, porters, grooms, gardeners, men and women servants, all dismissed—with the

exception of three female servants. The question then was, whether to shut up the House, leaving it in charge of a care-taker; or let it to a suitable tenant? As might have been expected, the Earl proved somewhat obstinate, here. He at first objected to letting for hire, the Home of his ancestors. The solicitor represented the double advantage of doing so. Firstly, the protection to Laxington House, externally and internally: to the rooms, walls, floors, carpets, valuable furniture, pictures, books, &c., which would otherwise be seriously injured by dust, damp, and dirt. Secondly, the very handsome aid, afforded by the rent, towards liquidating the debt, thereby shortening the period of the owner's exile. These views were shared in, and supported by Lady Honoria. And the Earl's assent was at length obtained, just in time. A very eligible tenant was found in Mr. Ringold, a millionaire merchant. He took the House and pleasure-grounds, on a three years' lease, without asking for any abatement of the terms. Thus, in spite of the Earl's wry face, his embarrassed affairs were benefited by an excellent business-like arrangement, effected by his solicitor's energy. Mr. Ringold was of the "Bounderby" breed. He took a pride in his liberality. He boasted that he had begun the world, with half-a-crown—whatever that may mean? Most infants begin the world, with less. Yet Ringold, the Plebeian, could afford to rent a

palatial residence, which its Patrician proprietor was too poor to inhabit!

Of course, Mr. Forrester was pleased to get back his *love*-letters; to be released from his engagement; and to know that the Estate which would eventually become his, was out at nurse. "Tony Lumpkin" took to himself, all the credit, for getting out of the matrimonial scrape, so cleverly. He boasted to that effect to his mother. But that long-headed lady very much doubted the fact! So that on the whole, the Earl's "flitting" was satisfactory to all parties. The opportunity was not lost upon Mr. Gnatstrainer. He preached an extempore discourse on the text: "He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seat; and hath exalted the humble and meek." The Calvinistic Grocer roared, bellowed, and howled incoherently for one hour. He vented blasphemies and libels. He spoke, as though he knew the intimate counsel of Omniscience. He contrasted the "Judgment" of the Earl's ruin, with his (Gnatstrainer's) own prosperity. He drew the conclusion that while *he* was one of the elect, the Earl was doomed to outer darkness! This travestie of Christian doctrine edified the majority (fanatics), and disgusted the judicious few. A report was somehow circulated, that the Earl of Laxington and Lady Forrester were upon the Continent. Society and Mrs. Grundy were hoodwinked.

Only a privileged few cared to know the real fact : That the Earl and Lady Honoria were living retired, in a suburban villa in South London ; within a circle, whose radii were each four miles from the London Post Office !

Was Lady Honoria's conduct inconsistent with her character? Some readers may think so. Yet, on reflection, this apparent inconsistency will disappear. Lady Honoria had acted like her better self. The spoilt child of Fashion had received a very severe, but salutary lesson. A weak-minded woman would have succumbed. But the sharp teaching of Adversity brought out all my Heroine's latent strength of character. Adversity is perhaps easier to bear, than Prosperity ! The painful accident which blemished her beauty, at first prostrated Lady Honoria. But, as her corporeal constitution triumphed over illness, so did a healthy moral reaction conquer her mental misfortune. Lady Honoria was profoundly penetrated by the suddenly-changed aspect of the world. What had happened to her ? Nothing more than what had happened to Dame Howlett—the loss of an eye ! Yet the Earl's daughter (who but the other day, had the world at her feet), was now become an object of pity. And pity is akin to contempt. Lady Honoria's calamity was thought too severe for condolence. Well-bred people avoided even the most indirect allusion to the subject. The man to whom she was engaged, whom she

had accepted simply to please her father, had given her up at once. At least, he had shown such a decided reluctance, that Lady Honoria's pride had at once taken alarm. And she had dismissed him. Yet, had Lady Honoria any right to despise her cousin? She had never even pretended to love him. She could not expect from him, that romantic affection, which sees the visage in the mind, and totally overlooks such a trifle as the loss of beauty!

Independently, too, of the immorality of marrying one, whom she neither loved, nor esteemed, Lady Honoria had entertained serious scruples on the score of relationship. A first cousin seemed too near akin for a husband. She congratulated herself on having released her cousin. Yet his eagerness to be released, hurt her feelings. For it taught her what she might now expect from other men, who had professed Love, Worship, Adoration for her! No more would she be chosen a Queen of Love and Beauty. No longer have lovers around her sighing, or enjoy as her acknowledged right, that empty, but delicious flattery, inspired by, Beauty alone, and cheerfully paid to its possessors, independently of any mental and moral qualities. And Lady Honoria was only twenty! She was not scarred by small-pox. Her figure was perfect. Her right profile as beautiful as ever. But the left, and full view of her face, showed the light of one eye

wanting. This was the only point of resemblance between her ladyship, and Polyphemus.

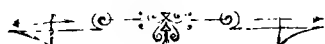
“Some natural tears *she* shed, but wiped them soon.”

Let this be recorded to my Heroine's credit. Some women, in her situation, would have found no aids either in philosophy, or religion: would have given way to unavailing grief, sunk into apathy, or in despairing madness, attempted suicide. Some women, who had undergone a similar misfortune, would have turned literary, and written Novels to pillory some man, or men, in particular, and mankind in general. Other women in a similar position, would have taken to platform-railing against all men, and most women!

Lady Honoria developed new, and hitherto unexpected, resources of strength. She took a retrospect of the last three years, since she had been “out.” Had she not indeed been all abroad? What a life of frivolity! She had aimed to distinguish herself as a leader of fashion, in this mad scene of sin, sorrow, folly, and selfishness, called Society—the “Upper Ten Thousand,” who look down on all the rest of the world, with pity! From this paltry rivalry, this gilded slavery, this contemptible routine of trifles; from this Vanity Fair, she had been at once, and for ever, set free, by what seemed at the time, the most

terrible of misfortunes. A glimpse into the insoluble Future, sometimes prompted the question: Is it a calamity at all? May it not be the greatest of blessings? She saw the first fruits, in the pure Filial love which saved her from an uncongenial marriage, and her father from a false position, ruin, and degradation. What might she have become, had she sunk to be the voluntary victim of a fashionable worldly marriage, without Love! Then her thoughts reverted to the Curate. She had soon bitterly repented her unladylike, and unwomanly violence to him. She regretted that solitary solecism in good breeding. Reflection soon showed her how completely she had become the temporary dupe of Blackadder. That wretch's triumphant baseness had provoked a terrible outburst against the innocent Curate! For; innocent of any intention to harm her, Lady Honoria upon reflection, knew him to be. Blackadder's bold lie now appeared in all its manifest malignant absurdity. She now wondered she could have given it a moment's credence. Alas! The high and well-born lady had believed it long enough, to do irreparable mischief to another, and to herself. She had lost her temper. She had given way to a burst of blind fury. She had falsely accused, and driven from her for ever, the first man who taught her she had a heart! She had alienated the only man whose confession of love really interested her; whose pure and

ardent love, had broken down all conventional barriers between them ; and forced her to reciprocate his passion. She had separated herself from the only man who really loved her—if indeed the Curate's love could outlast that terrible strain? Lady Honoria had learned the full value of a good man's love, at last, now—when it was *too late*!



CHAPTER III.

THE CURATE IN HARNESS—LADY HONORIA
RECEIVES A PROPOSAL—THE CURATE HEARS A
SINGULAR CONFESSION!

HUMANLY speaking, it was perhaps as well that Lady Honoria had no opportunity of meeting the Curate, and clearing up the serious misunderstanding. He seemed now effectually cured of his hallucination. His attempt at self-destruction—though in a moment of frenzy—had deeply humbled him. He supposed a gulf now opened for ever, between him, and Lady Honoria. He went forth from Laxington, a changed man. Sobered by the sanctifying influence of a great sorrow. He felt ashamed of the nickname of “The Wild Curate” in which he had once rather gloried. He wished now to re-dedicate himself to The Saviour! For a very brief period, the Curate listened to his ambitious worldly brother’s schemes, to attempt literature. But the Curate felt he was doing wrong in thus compromising with the World, and trying to serve two masters. He cheerfully accepted a curacy, obtained

through the interest of his firm friend, Mr. Stedfast M.P. This curacy was in South London, and, *mirabile dictu*, in the immediate neighbourhood of the house occupied by the Earl and Lady Honoria. Was this chance? Or was it intentional on the part of Mr. Stedfast? That worthy man was doing his best to bring the lovers together again, naturally, and without officious interference. But the proximity was chance, so far as the Curate was concerned. He did not know where his former Aristocratic friends were living. The Curate believed the rumour that they were upon the Continent. He braced himself to hear the news of Lady Honoria's marriage to her cousin!

The Curate was once more in harness. He was taking up again the links of that skein which a fair lady had unravelled, not a year ago, *pour passer le temps*! What had begun as a joke, and to gratify revenge, had apparently ended in the wreck of two lives. The Curate was not happy. Happiness and he had shaken hands. But he was doing his *Duty*. Like every one so employed, he found his grief tolerable. He was determined to live, if only for his dear Mother's sake. How much she had suffered in secret, he now knew, and tried to make amends for all the sorrow he had caused her. He was quite subdued. He would have been satisfied to spend, and be spent, in visiting the poor, sick, and distressed. But he was

frequently called upon to preach. And preaching was his *forte*. He had a generally more intelligent congregation, than at Laxington. And to his astonishment, he discovered that, after a long intermission, he preached *extempore*, with far greater ease, and more effectively, than he had done in the country, when he had taken great pains with his sermons. The reason was obvious to Mr. Stedfast, and to all reflecting persons, who knew the Curate's history. He practically illustrated the sentiment—

“We learn in suffering, what we teach in song.”

He had said Farewell to the World. Metaphorically, he had foundered in the great waters. “Deep had called unto deep.” The billows had gone over his head. He could truthfully say: “*De profundis clamavi.*” He preached from his heart. Longfellow observes; “Look into thine heart, and write.” The Curate looked into his heart, and spake. He knew now, from long experience, the great truth, so often preached in vain by those who have never felt, and therefore do not believe it;—“*Vanitas vanitatum, Omnia vanitas.*” In his place, some men would have turned misanthropes. Even Timon's generous heart did not save him from that fatal error. Christianity saved the Curate, as it saves many. He felt all the practical comfort of his creed. He preached, as he believed. He

therefore made others believe. This was the grand secret of his success. This was his only art, his "mighty magic," to become (as he did, in three years)—a popular preacher. "*Ars est celare artem.*" Most pulpit orators are spoiled by self-consciousness. They know they are clever. They get to think themselves much more clever, and better, than they really are. No men are more exposed to dangerous, insidious, and self-deluding flattery, than preachers!

From this fault, the Curate was singularly free. In vain, did fashionable female members of his congregation, try to spoil him, as they had most effectually spoiled other "dear men." He avoided the society of "gushing" women, as much as possible. He was consequently considered churlish, until required in his spiritual capacity. Indeed, so little delight did he take in female society, that some said, he must be engaged. Others thought him vowed to clerical celibacy: That but for his Mother, he would become a Roman Catholic Priest. But men and women found his preaching irresistible. He could make an hour, seem only twenty-minutes! When he closed, the sigh was not of *relief*, but *regret*. His congregation hung upon his words. When he preached, the Church was crowded. He seemed to look right through the human heart. No affectation, attitudinising, and coxcombry. Such contemptible pulpit

tricks prove conclusively, that those who condescend to them, have no conception of the solemnity of the preacher's office. None of the handkerchief and ring business, so witheringly denounced by Cowper. That religious poet, after describing the pulpit orator, as he should be, adds :

“ Behold the picture ! Is it like ? Like whom ?
The things that mount the rostrum with a skip,
And then skip down again ; pronounce a text ;
Cry—hem ; and, reading what they never wrote,
Just fifteen minutes, huddle up their work,
And with a well-bred whisper close the scene ! ”

Leaving the Curate for the present, let us glance in at the trim suburban villa, in which lived the Earl of Laxington, and his daughter. “ The logic of events ” had weakened Lord Forrester's selfishness. His own personal privations he could bear with tolerable fortitude, so long as his daughter was happy. And, to his great delight, the thorough change in their style of living, did not make Lady Honoria unhappy. She showed a wonderful adaptation to circumstances. Her ladyship went to market herself, and by the aid of a good cook, gave the Earl dinners which he actually enjoyed. Whatever he felt, he never verbally regretted the loss of Monsieur Chevron, his French *chef*. The Earl's present dinners, if less sumptuous, were perhaps more wholesome. Gradually, the Earl became used, to the absence of

grandeur and ceremony. He passed his time between his club, and his home. He kept no carriage. Sometimes he walked ; sometimes, he condescended to travel by omnibus. He generally gratified his daughter, by showing a hearty appetite at dinner. He was astonished to find himself so contented and happy, in his reverse of fortune. The novelty at first amused him. When that wore off, habit began to assert its salutary sway. Lady Honoria's sweetness and good temper, did the rest. That incomparable young lady never repined. She never seemed out of spirits, in her father's company. In similar circumstances, some women inculcate resignation, with sighs, which drive men to despair ! Lady Honoria cheered her father, in a totally opposite fashion. Whenever he seemed inclined to despond, and to hanker after the luxuries of his previous life, she reminded him that their exile was only temporary, that three years would soon pass away ; and that then, thanks to the honest lawyer's indefatigable exertions in settling their affairs, by disposing the rents and the large sum received from their mansion, to clearing off encumbrances ; the property would right itself. And her father would be enabled to return to Laxington House, as real owner of the Estate.

The Earl was at first much annoyed, by the familiarity of the lower orders. At Laxington, he had been looked up to, and respected,

as a great territorial magnate. In London, he found himself a nobody. For the first time in his life, the Earl heard himself called *old*, and alluded to, as an old gentleman, by omnibus-cads, and others. Hearing oneself called old for the first time, causes an unpleasant sensation. It taxes our philosophy. The Earl was only sixty, and very well preserved. "Tom Pinch" advertised himself as "a young man of thirty-five." The Earl could hardly think himself young. But old at sixty—certainly not! Relating this novel experience to his daughter, the Earl said: "It was rudeness: radical republican rudeness. Part and parcel of the levelling system, which the populace has been so rapidly learning, ever since the Reform Bill of 1832."

Lady Honoria replied: "But for that Reform Bill, there would have been a revolution, and our Order might have ceased to exist. Whereas Reform helped to give it a new lease of life."

"Honoria, in Bulwer Lytton's words, do you not perceive slowly sweeping over the troubled mirror of the Time the giant shadow of the coming Republic?" *

"Not in our time, papa."

"You think not?"

"I perceive that Aristocracy leavens the great mass of the people. Even those who

abuse us, copy us. Our butcher, Mr. Brisket, is a thorough Aristocrat. He discards the Plebeian epithet of butcher. He calls himself 'Purveyor of Meat.' His wife occupies a small compartment, partitioned off from the shop. She sits there like a Queen on her throne, taking tribute from her subjects; that is, taking money from her customers. Mr. Brisket *was* exceedingly independent. His manner changed perceptibly when he knew he had a titled customer."

Society of course was still open to the Earl and his daughter. But the Earl considered himself as living *incognito*. Pride would not suffer him to accept hospitality, which he was not in a position to return. He would have blushed at seeing Aristocratic friends in his suburban villa. Lady Honoria had lost her taste for Society, for another reason. Her time was fully occupied in superintending her house, and providing for her father's comforts. A good supply of books had been brought from the library at Laxington House. Mudie's furnished new novels. When it was found that the Earl and his daughter preferred seclusion, they were allowed to enjoy their whim. Society voted them "odd," and left them alone. There were some exceptions. One of these I must mention. Lord Oddfish surprised Lady Honoria, by a morning call. The Earl was absent. This circumstance did not seem to vex Lord Oddfish. He rambled on, somewhat incoherently, about

the weather. For the first time in Lady Honoria's experience, he seemed under evident constraint. At last, he astonished her, by formally proposing for her hand. The unexpected communication was made awkwardly. All the more to the credit of his lordship's sincerity, and depth of feeling. He depreciated himself too, not intending to fish for compliments, but evidently speaking *ex animo*. He expressed as delicately as he could, that he had always admired his kinswoman Lady Honoria, but until lately, without hope. While she was a Queen of Fashion he did not presume to aspire to the honour of her hand. But recent changes induced him to let her know his sentiments. These changes, not specified, doubtless implied Lady Honoria's personal calamity, her rupture with the Curate, and the embarrassment of the Earl's affairs, exaggerated by common report. The suitor concluded thus: "Should I be as fortunate as I desire, but do not deserve to be, I will devote my life to make you happy." With a return to his old jocularly, he added: "Should I have the honour to call you mine, and should my many faults render you unhappy, I will die off, as soon as possible, and leave you at liberty, to form a more eligible connection."

This proposal touched Lady Honoria far more than she could have believed possible. Time was, when the bare idea of a proposal from Lord Oddfish, at anything more serious

than *Ecarté*, would have convulsed her with laughter. In her heyday of life, had he ventured on such a step, she would have treated it as a joke; and if he had persisted, resented it as a liberty. Now, how changed were her sentiments! She could not love Lord Oddfish. She could, and did respect him, for paying her the greatest compliment which man can pay woman! She now understood that he really loved her, for herself. Fortune she never possessed. But in the height of her beauty and fashion, Lady Honoria was a matrimonial prize. Now, Lord Oddfish believed her father to be not merely embarrassed, but ruined. Now, Lady Honoria had lost her beauty. She had lost all her professed admirers, except the Curate. Yet this was the time chosen by Lord Oddfish, to ask her to be his wife. Lady Honoria honoured and respected Lord Oddfish for the *manner* no less than the *matter*. There was a humility, born of true love, a delicacy in the faint allusion to the change of circumstances, which might have made him a fit partner. He showed a refinement, a *bonhomie* worthy of *la veille Cour*. Respect, regard, and consideration, might have developed into warmer feelings. Had Lady Honoria been heart-whole, she might, with time, have smiled upon his lordship's suit. Time was too, when her ladyship might have played with the feelings even of this mature *beau*; and given him an ambiguous answer. But her days of *Flirtation* were over. Her accident had trans-

formed the giddy Coquette, into the true Woman. That which purifies the human soul, by some trifling diminution of perishable beauty, can not, with truth, be called Calamity!

How did Lady Honoria answer Lord Oddfish? As only a woman of her breeding and refinement, could answer. She thanked him cordially, for the high compliment paid her. She regretted she could not accept his offer. She had resolved never to marry, but live for her father. Once, Lord Oddfish would not have been satisfied with this answer. He would not have accepted a woman's "No." Now, he knew that Lady Honoria meant what she said. He accepted her answer as final. And with his characteristic courtesy, he did not even ask her to reconsider her determination. There was no cant in Lady Honoria's expression of a hope, that they might always remain friends. She invited him to stay to dinner. He begged to be excused. He said truly, that he did not feel equal to facing her father, then. Lady Honoria gave her hand at parting. Lord Oddfish pressed it respectfully to his lips, and then withdrew, with the tears of genuine emotion in his eyes. Try her best, Lady Honoria could not raise her spirits, that day. She attended at dinner, lest her father should be alarmed. The Earl said:—"What makes you so dull, Honoria? And you eat almost nothing. Are you unwell, dear?"

"Quite well, papa. That is, I have only a little headache."

"Has anything happened to vex you to-day?"

"Nothing, I assure you, dear papa."

"I tell you all my troubles, Honoria. I hope you will be equally candid, and confiding."

"Really I would, papa. But I do assure you, nothing has occurred to annoy me. Quite the contrary."

* * * * *

Two years had elapsed. During this period, Lady Honoria and the Curate never met. Each was living an outwardly monotonous—but a really good, honest, true, and useful life. Each was unconsciously receiving that higher education of the world, which purifies the soul. Each was repenting the thoughtless errors of youth. It is not to be supposed that Lady Honoria never heard of the Curate. He was not only a popular preacher, but an indefatigable parish-worker. Lady Honoria did many good works in secret. While thus employed, she must often have heard of the Curate. Besides, there were Mr. Stedfast's periodical visits. He never mentioned the Curate, without praise, and often said emphatically, he never knew a better man. The Curate knew most of his regular parishioners, who, to use an elegant phrase, "sat under him." There were two female frequenters of

his church, whom (if he observed) he did not know. Evidently in different stations of life. One, a tall elegant woman of aristocratic bearing, though dressed with studious simplicity. From her figure and elastic walk, a connoisseur would have pronounced her young. She was also closely veiled. Women love to display their charms. Hence, the connoisseur would have concluded the lady not beautiful. Her sense of hearing seemed acute. She invariably sat in the back-seats, among the poor, who enjoyed the cold cross draughts, when North and South doors were opened. The lady paid great attention to the sermon. The other *incognita* was a young woman, shorter, and less elegant in shape. She also sat far back from the pulpit, and concealed her features, as much as possible.

One evening, this young person accosted the Curate in the street. His first impression was, that she was a fallen woman. Following his Divine Master's example, the Curate was always kind and gentle to these poor creatures. He had thus been instrumental in saving many, repelled by those who copy the Pharisee—not Jesus! Although liable to misrepresentation, the young man acted in the integrity of his heart. He stopped at once, prepared to listen to her tale of distress; to help with money and advice. The woman beckoned to him, to step aside from the main thoroughfare, into a by-street. She then said:—"I perceive sir, that you have forgotten me."

The Curate gazed more earnestly, and said, "Do I know you? Your voice and features seem familiar. Ah now, I remember—Miss Minckes."

No wonder the Curate did not at first recognise his former parishioner. Two years had wrought a great change in her. She was pale and wan. Her features were pinched and fallen away;—the mere ghost of what she had been. But for the cast in the eye, recognition might have been impossible. She said:—"I know I am very much changed. No wonder, after all the trouble I have seen."

A man of the world, would have made an excuse to go away at once, lest she should ask him to lend money. But even in his wildest days, the Curate had never been, that poor shallow thing—a man of the world! He said "My dear Miss Minckes, have you been ill?"

"Nearly dead! But it is not bodily illness that troubles me most. I want your advice—your help."

"You shall have both. But we must not stand and talk in the street. Here is my address. I am living with my Mother, as before. If you appoint a time to call, I shall be at home"

"If you don't mind the trouble, Mr. Weatherall, would you call on me? Here is my address." She gave him a slip of paper, with her address.

Next day he called. It was a common

lodging-house in a back street. Miss Minckes received him in a room which bore all the marks of poverty. A baby in a cradle, at once attracted the Curate's attention. He looked at Miss Minckes, and saw a plain gold ring on the wedding-finger. From this, he concluded that she was married. But he could not congratulate her on her marriage.

Miss Minckes burst into tears, and said: "I read your thoughts. You think this is a child of shame? That I am an unmarried mother? Such is my cruel position, that I cannot even answer the question. But this I do know, that if not legally married, that sin is not mine, but his who betrayed me. But to understand my false position, I must tell you my whole history, for the last four or five years."

The sad story occupied an hour. It is unnecessary to give it, in the narrator's words. Miss Minckes began with her misunderstanding of the Curate's intentions towards herself, and of the consequent grudge she bore him. (Book I., Chap. V.) She related how she became "Companion" to Lady Honoria, and made acquaintance with Blackadder. How he took advantage of her grudge against the Curate, to pervert her mind, and mould her to the Secretary's purpose of vengeance, against Lady Honoria, and the Curate. Miss Minckes related the visit paid by Mrs. Weatherall, to Lady Honoria, and the whole particulars of the

interview, as overheard by herself, and afterwards communicated to her confederate, Blackadder. (Book III., Chap. II.) Their object being to get Lady Honoria into their power, and so make her pay for keeping her secret; or obtain more money, by betraying it to the Earl.

No wonder that the Curate was interested in hearing his own secret history, as well as hers. She startled him, by the information that the mysterious assassin, who attempted his life on the evening of the 10th of April, upwards of two years ago, was *Blackadder!* To the natural question: How she knew this? she replied that Blackadder had confessed it, in a fit of intoxication.

“Heavens!” exclaimed the Curate. “Lady Honoria told me the same. But I thought her mistaken. Why should he attempt my life? I never injured him.”

“He considered you his rival with Lady Honoria. But under any circumstances, it was natural for the worst of men, to hate the best. Pardon me, Mr. Weatherall, I pay no empty compliments. I know *him*, and I know *you*.” She then proceeded to inform the Curate, that the man in the smock-frock, who threw the firework, causing the accident so nearly fatal to Lady Honoria, was *Blackadder!* This, he had also told her in a moment of confidence. She also informed the Curate, that the Gipsy who told his fortune, had been bribed by Blackadder to

do so, to further the engagement with Lady Honoria. And that the second interview with the Gipsy had also been planned, to render the Curate nervous, at the Tournament of Doves. But here, Blackadder had over-reached himself. The Gipsy, suspecting his disguise assumed for a sinister purpose, had followed, and recognised him, in the crowd beyond the ha-ha. And the woman was prepared to swear that Blackadder had thrown the fatal firework. Miss Minckes further accounted for her knowledge, by stating that she had overheard an angry interview between Blackadder and the Gipsy. The woman had threatened to accuse him of throwing the firework, and of having attempted to murder the Curate. Blackadder had bribed her not to betray him!

Miss Minckes then enlightened the Curate, as to Blackadder's real motive in visiting him (Book V. Chap. V.); *i.e.*, to bring about the rupture with Lady Honoria. How Blackadder had insulted, irritated, poisoned Lady Honoria's mind, immediately before; and actually succeeded in making her believe, that the Curate had intentionally wounded her! How Blackadder had been a concealed witness of the Curate's meeting with Lady Honoria. How he had followed the Curate, seen him attempt suicide, and only saved by the opportune appearance, and resolute conduct of his Mother! Here, the Curate interrupted these extraordinary

revelations, by an exclamation of honest indignation.

“Unparalleled villain! Then, I was his dupe, all along. I thought him my friend. I could not conceive such baseness. Did he actually look on? Would he have let me drown myself, when he could so easily have prevented me?”

“Much more than that. You do not know his wickedness! From his own admissions to me, I know that he even meditated another attempt at murder!”

“How?”

“He was actually on the point of rushing out from his hiding-place, and pushing you into the lake, when he saw you resolved to drown yourself, and so save him the trouble.”

Having finished the particulars of Blackadder's villainy, relating to the Curate, Miss Minckes next narrated Blackadder's double dealing towards the Earl. How the Secretary had planned the whole Election opposition, had gone to London expressly to secure Shifter's services; and had written Shifter's Address. That Shifter, disappointed in losing his election, had quarrelled with Blackadder, and out of revenge, had told the Earl, *who* wrote the Address. That this caused Blackadder's dismissal. When he had sufficiently overcome his astonishment at Blackadder's infamy, the Curate asked Miss Minckes if she could account for the Secretary's apparent inconsistency?

“ You say Blackadder planned all this, to get Lady Honoria into his power, and trade on the knowledge of our secret engagement. Why, then, did he first attempt to murder me, and afterwards try most effectually, to cause a rupture between Lady Honoria and me? He ought rather to have encouraged our good understanding, and thus retained the power of revealing it to the Earl.”

“ What you say is quite true, sir. I have asked myself the same question. I can only account for his conduct, by supposing that his evil temper overcame his judgment. He evidently gave way to an ungovernable impulse of revenge, caused by jealousy, on the evening he saw you, and Lady Honoria riding home together. Self-interest failed to curb his passion. Then his summary dismissal by the Earl, intensified Blackadder’s desire of revenge. He must have modified, or altered, his original plan, and preferred to see you dismissed by Lady Honoria, to any pecuniary satisfaction he might receive, from betraying your engagement. Besides, his relations with the Earl, were then so completely changed, that Blackadder probably despaired of obtaining money for the secret. At any rate, whether acting from reflection or impulse, he preferred the gratification of his malice, to gain.

“ Now, I have told you Blackadder’s conduct towards the Earl, Lady Honoria, and yourself. I must relate his conduct towards me. He has behaved like himself, a villain

to all. He traded on my *envy*, to pervert my mind. He made me a spy and a traitress to my dear good mistress, Lady Honoria, and to you, sir. He made me his tool, confederate, and slave."

"He told me you were engaged to him."

"He spoke the truth there. He promised me marriage repeatedly, most solemnly. But there is nothing sacred to an Atheist! When I urged him to have the banns put up, he objected conscientious scruples against being married in Church. He assured me that we could be legally married in a Register Office. When the Earl's establishment was broken up, I followed Blackadder up to London. We went through a ceremony, which I firmly believed then, and even still think, to be binding in law. I took his name. We lived together, as man and wife. I gave up to my husband, every penny of my five years' savings. After that, his manner changed. He had loved, or affected to love me. He now threw off the mask; became brutal, harsh, cruel. He betted and lost money. He gave way to intoxication. Our housekeeping was wretched. But knowing him now, to be such a desperate character, I felt afraid to remonstrate with him. However, after my baby was born, I reasoned with the father. I urged him to abandon his bad habits, his dangerous companions; to work, and save for his child. My husband, flew into a rage, threatened, and at last struck me!

“ Our altercations, disputes, and quarrels became frequent. One day, I contrasted my miserable condition, with the happy, luxurious life I had led at Laxington House. I said : I did not marry, to be treated like a slave ; to be starved, abused, and beaten. I threatened to leave him. He indulged in one of his fits of sneering laughter, and then said : I might go when, and where, I pleased. That he had never loved me ; that he had deceived me, partly to obtain my money, partly to make me the tool of his revenge. That his jealousy was not on my account, but caused by your attachment for Lady Honoria, whom he, Blackadder, had once loved, and now hated ! I replied that whether he loved me, or not, it was his duty to support his lawful wife. That I would leave him, and take legal proceedings for alimony. He then coolly declared that I was not his wife ; that he had deluded me by a mock marriage, and defied me to prove any legal claim upon him. I reproached him vehemently. He threatened violence. I cried for help, for I saw murder in his eyes ! He grasped me by the throat. I remember no more. When I recovered, I was lying on the floor. Blackadder was gone. He had left me and his child, without any visible means of subsistence. But for some trinkets, that I had secreted from his cupidity, I must have starved, or gone to the workhouse. I have never seen Blackadder since—now about seven or eight months. I

do not know whether he spoke truly, or lied, about the ceremony. I do not know whether I am legally married, or not. But for the disgrace to my innocent boy, I would infinitely prefer not to be the wife of such a monster, as I now know his father to be. Personally, I should feel more safe to think he had no claims upon me."

Miss Minckes thus concluded: "In my agony, I gave way to despair, and meditated suicide. I had determined—I was actually on my way—to drown my baby and myself, in the canal. I passed a Church, and while gazing vacantly on the notice-board, I was attracted by your name, as that of the Curate in charge. The remembrance of your trials caused a sudden revulsion of feeling. I recalled that you, in a fit of frenzy, had once tried to commit suicide. You had been rescued. You were now reconciled to life. Why should it not be so with me? I went home. I kissed my dear baby. I fell on my knees, and prayed. It was the first time for years. Blackadder, the Atheist, had sneered me out of the habit of praying. From that time, I attended your Church quite regularly on Sunday evenings. I have heard many of your sermons. They comforted me, and helped to complete my conversion. I now perceived clearly, that all my sufferings were a judgment on me, for my sins. I had condescended to become the confederate of the basest of men, against the best of men, and

women. I was justly punished for conspiring against you, and Lady Honoria. And there seemed a special justice in the fact, that my confederate, was the instrument of my punishment. The idea occurred with ever increasing force, that my repentance was incomplete and fruitless, unless I made all the reparation in my power. It is true, I had not helped directly, to cause the breach between you, and Lady Honoria. But I knew who had caused it. And so long as I kept the guilty secret, I was aiding and abetting in his villainy. It was clearly my duty, to tell you all I knew ; for two reasons. Firstly, to remove, if possible, the mutual misunderstanding now estranging you and Lady Honoria. Secondly, to prevent the possibility of further, and still more serious mischief. My husband had separated you from Lady Honoria. But his malice seemed not yet sated. He often threatened further vengeance against you, Lady Honoria, and the Earl. These might be no empty threats. Blackadder had tried to shoot you ; was on the point of drowning you ! Opportunity would tempt such an unprincipled and desperate wretch, to any deed. I have relieved my conscience. You now know all. And you will be able to take proper precautions for the safety of yourself, Lady Honoria, and the Earl."

CHAPTER IV.

LADY HONORIA'S FATHER CONFESSOR—RECONCILIATION OF THE LOVERS!

THE effect of this singular revelation on the Curate, must be imagined. Lady Honoria's violent reproaches at their last interview, had rankled in his mind. These were now explained. Her conduct, though not justifiable, was explicable, and could plead extenuation. Miss Minckes, or as we must now call her, Mrs. Blackadder, was with difficulty, prevailed on to call on Mrs. Weatherall. The old lady treated her with great benevolence, assisted her with money, and helped her to get work. The kindness of the Curate and his Mother, did not end here. The Curate had now paid off his debt to Mr. Stedfast, and confided to him, Mrs. Blackadder's communication. He did not appear much astonished at what he heard of Blackadder's wickedness.

Mr. Stedfast said: "I always suspected Blackadder to be a villain. I warned the Earl of him. I think you, Lady Honoria, and the Earl, are deeply indebted to Mrs. Blackadder, for these confessions against her unworthy husband. She has now put you

on your guard, against such a dangerous character. He is lurking in London, living by his wits. What scheme of wickedness may he not now be hatching against you, Lady Honoria, and the Earl? I feel it my duty to warn his lordship."

The worthy M.P. kept his word. He represented Mrs. Blackadder as really contrite, and most eager to be forgiven by Lady Honoria. That forgiveness was easily obtained. Lady Honoria always had her misgivings, respecting the Secretary's influence over her Companion, and had indeed warned the latter, against the former. At Lady Honoria's desire, an interview took place between her, and Mrs. Blackadder. Sincere repentance on one side, was followed by sincere pardon, on the other. Mrs. Blackadder was comforted by the reconciliation, and was eager to complete the work of compensation, by devoting herself to Lady Honoria's service.

Her ladyship asked: "Would you like to return to me again?"

"Oh! my dear lady, it is the most fervent wish of my heart, to be near you again. I would make amends, so far as I could, for my base treachery to you, my benefactress. My trials have taught me how good and kind you were to me. How truly happy I was, while living under your protection. If I might, I would devote my life to watching over, to guard, and possibly shield you from fresh machinations of a villain. Would that I

had not despised your warnings ! You knew his character better than I did, then. But I cannot expect you to trust me now. And I feel as if I could not face your father."

"I prove that I trust you, by offering to take you back again. I will ask my father. I am sure he will not object."

"Well then, dear lady, if the Earl approves, let me come as a *servant*. I have no foolish pride now. I wish to prove my thorough change of heart. I think I am contrite and humble."

"Nay, Matilda, it must be in your old condition of Companion, or not at all. We are indebted to you, for the disclosures you have made. You yourself stand in need of protection against your unworthy husband. And do you know, I have often missed you !"

Mrs. Blackadder burst into tears. Lastly, she objected her equivocal condition.. She was a mother, without knowing if she were legally married.

"But you went through, what you believed a real marriage ceremony?"

"As I hope to be saved, my lady, I firmly believed the marriage was legal."

"Then the sin is not yours, but the man's, who deliberately deceived you. Either in pretending the marriage was real, when it was not : or, in declaring it a mock marriage, when it was real."

Eventually, Mrs. Blackadder was reinstated in her old situation. Those singular Chris-

tians who never forgive, will think Lady Honoria very foolish. She had no reason to repent her trust. Mrs. Blackadder was a changed being. It seems superfluous to relate, that through the instrumentality of Mr. Stedfast, and Mrs. Blackadder, Lady Honoria and the Earl were fully convinced that they had treated the Curate most unjustly. This will more fully appear, in the following remarkable dialogue between father and daughter. One day at breakfast the Earl said :

“Honoria, my love, are you happy, living thus ? ”

“Papa, I can truly say, I am happy ; but for one thing. I think it wrong to have a secret from so fond a father.”

“Nay, my love, I am not curious. I have perfect confidence in you.”

“For that very reason, dear papa, I am ashamed to have kept a secret from you so long.”

“Perhaps it is no secret,” said the Earl, archly. “If I don’t mistake, it concerns our old acquaintance, Rev. Mr. Weatherall.”

Lady Honoria blushed crimson, and said : “Oh, papa ! then you guessed that—that—”

“That he admired you. That was evident from the very first. And I sometimes thought that you showed him more countenance, than was becoming from a lady of your rank, to a poor Curate.”

“Papa, let us have no illusions. There is,

or *was*, a great difference between me and Mr. Weatherall, in rank, but not in fortune. My fortune was just £200 per annum. The Curate, with his eloquence, might reasonably hope to rise in the Church, and become far my superior in fortune."

"But, Honoria, all that is, or will be, changed. Oldstyle writes me, he sees his way to have everything settled in another year. When we return to Laxington House, I shall not repeat my former extravagance. I shall begin to lay by, for *you*, my only child—my guardian angel! You saved me from something more than ruin. You saved my reputation, my honour. In a few years, you will have a fortune. I am not a very old man. I hope to live to see you settled. I cannot expect to keep you with me always. I know no one worthy of you. But I hope, Honoria, when you do marry, you will select some one not too far from Laxington. So that we may meet often; once a week at least. I don't think I could exist longer, without seeing you."

"Papa, I have no wish to marry. If I had—my days of selection are over, now. Many young ladies pass *gradually* from the triumphant question 'Whom shall I have?' to the humiliating question, 'Who will have me?' But that change came *suddenly* to me, ever since my accident."

The Earl was silent. But his face wore an angry expression, well understood by Lady

Honoriam, to mean, "I have not forgiven; I never shall forgive the author of that accident." She answered that look:

"Papa, let me speak plainly. It is all one subject with my secret. Are you not still under the impression that the Rev. Mr. Weatherall was to blame, for the accident which deprived me of my left eye?"

"Of course I am, as every one then present must be."

"Oh, papa, we do him great injustice. But I have no right to blame your error. Mine went so much further."

"As how, my love?"

"Why, papa, at my last interview with Mr. Weatherall, I so far forgot myself, as to insult him grossly. Yes, papa, I blush to state the fact. I spoke more like an angry fishwoman, than a lady. And, as the culmination of my cruel injustice, I actually charged him with destroying my eye purposely."

The Earl started, as well he might.

"Honoriam, is it possible? In my very natural excitement, immediately after the accident, when I saw you bleeding on the ground, I used strong language. I hardly know what I said. But when I came to reflect, I perceived that it was really more the poor man's misfortune, than his fault."

"But papa, you said just now, that he was to blame."

"He certainly was. Totally unaccustomed

to firearms, he ought never to have engaged in the shooting-match at all."

"But, papa, you appear to forget, that that was all my doing. I persuaded. I insisted. Mr. Weatherall begged so hard, to be excused. Ah, papa, so far as his engaging in the Tournament goes, it was all my fault. As for the accident—the real author, was the unknown person, who flung the cracker at that critical moment——"

"The miscreant! Well for him that he remains unknown!"

Lady Honoria prudently concealed from her father, the information communicated by her Companion, that this person was Blackadder. For, had the Earl been acquainted with this fact, he would have employed detectives to discover Blackadder, and bring him to justice. And independently of the difficulty of proving Blackadder guilty of *malice prepense*, the idea of revenge was now totally repugnant to the *new heart* of Lady Honoria. For the sake of his unhappy wife, Lady Honoria wished Blackadder left to the punishment of his own conscience. And she was right. For the words of Horace, were in this case, to be singularly vindicated:

"Rarò antecedentem scelestum
Deseruit pede pœna claudo."

"Seldom hath punishment, though lame of foot, failed to overtake a villain."

Lady Honoria continued:

“ Now, dear papa, we both agree, that we have done the Curate injustice in this respect. But it seems to me, we do not both quite perceive the whole extent of our injustice towards him.”

“ How so, my love? I asked him to my house. I showed him hospitality. I introduced him to the best County Society. I mounted him on a thoroughbred hunter. These are surely not specimens of *injustice* ? ”

“ But, papa, remember the motives of our attention to Mr. Weatherall. They did not spring from any desire really to benefit him, but the very reverse. It was not out of regard to him. Was it not rather from a desire of *revenge* ? ”

The Earl, as well he might, looked confused at this pointed question. Lady Honoria pursued her advantage.

“ It is so long ago. Perhaps you have forgotten why Mr. Weatherall was asked to Laxington House. You know, dear papa, we were both indignant with him, for preaching against our favourite amusement — *Hunting*—and for his severe reflections.”

“ True ; I remember.”

“ You were so angry, papa, that you actually wrote a letter to the Rector, requesting him to dismiss the Curate. Which letter, I persuaded you not to send. I burned it.”

“ Yes, I recollect. It was very kind and prudent of you. You gave me very good advice.”

"Papa, I don't deserve your praise. I can't bear it. For all that followed, I take the blame to myself. It was all my doing. You never would have thought of asking the Curate to dinner, had I not proposed it."

"I don't think I would. But you don't insult, wrong, or injure a man, by asking him to dinner."

"All depends on the motive. That motive was *malice*!"

"You do yourself injustice, Honoria."

"No, papa—indeed I do not. You knew nothing of my designs. You thought I merely wanted to scold him. You said I was letting him off too cheaply. I replied, 'Perhaps he was not to be altogether let off.'" (Book I. Chap. v.)

"I could not divine your plan."

"No, papa, you could not know how wicked I was."

The Earl started, and closely scrutinised his daughter.

"*Wicked*! Pshaw! You are labouring under a hallucination."

"Let me continue, papa. *Wicked* is the only word, that really expresses my design. I am not ashamed to speak of my former self, as I really was, in all my hideous moral deformity. Nay, hear me out, papa. This confession must be made. I was then in the heyday of my beauty. I thought the world was at my feet. I was intoxicated with vanity. I had no self-knowledge. Now, I know the

base thing I was—a *Flirt*! Yes papa, and that word is too often pronounced, without a thorough consciousness, of all the infamy it implies. But you will quite understand it, when I tell you, *why* I encouraged the Curate. I was actuated by *revenge*! I saw in him, a mere Clerical bookworm, a kind of Dominie Sampson, who had offended us; one who must therefore be punished, and taught to know his place, in future. Your natural plan of punishment, to have him dismissed from his curacy, was far too simple for me. My plan was more subtle, more refined—let me say it—more awfully wicked! I proposed to inveigle him, as I had others. To make the poor simple man lose his heart to me, and then, to scorn, laugh at, and dismiss him! Well may you shudder, papa. You are unable to believe such baseness of your child. Such, I was then. I do not wish to be unjust, or uncharitable. But I fear, many young and beautiful women might make a similar confession. There may be some extenuation of my fault. I had not a Mother's careful training. I had the evil example of the world, and the prejudices of my class and sex, to blind me to the true nature of the sin I was committing. We read, and hear of men taking vengeance, even to *bloodshed*, upon women, who have deceived them, and played with their best, and holiest feelings. Ah papa! Now that I know what an awful crime it is, to simulate Love; to encourage a genuine and

strong passion, which one does not reciprocate; I do not wonder at the victims of such atrocious duplicity, in a fit of frenzy, murdering their vivisectors!

“Well, papa, my plot succeeded, but too well! The Curate fell into the snare, as others had done. You were indignant at the bare idea of his raising his eyes to me. You could not conceive such audacity on his part, or such shameless artifice on mine. You may still say, he had no right to dare to *love* me; for that I gave him no visible encouragement. That inviting him to our house, and treating him with courtesy, did not excuse him. And that he was conceited. Ah papa, you know not the real timidity of a well-educated, modest man. Nor the fatal power with which women are invested, during the fleeting period of youth and beauty—invested, doubtless, for the wisest purposes—to make worthy men happy—and which power, women often so disgracefully abuse—to render their lovers (and, sooner or later, themselves) miserable! Papa, I speak of what I know, and have personally proved. A girl of sixteen is a greater adept in love matters, than a sage of sixty. You smile. Nothing is more true. For example, you blamed the Curate—not me! It was all my fault. If I had been cold and distant, the worthy man would not have dreamed of Love. If ever I saw a really modest, humble-minded man, unconscious of his own mental and moral worth, it was the

Curate. But I encouraged him. Miss Wildgoose, so clever in her own imagination, has, in our hearing, often affected to pity women, as slaves; and especially in love-affairs—because we are not allowed forsooth, the same directness, frankness, and latitude, permitted to men! Did you ever hear such nonsense? What hinders women from proposing directly to men? No law! The good sense of women! Not even modesty. Women who secretly despise modesty, affect it most, for this excellent reason: They know perfectly well, that making love directly to men, is the surest course to frighten lovers away; to convert the most ardent, despairing admirer, into a cool-headed, cold-hearted, cautious, despiser of them, and perhaps of their whole sex! Confess now, papa. Miss Wildgoose tried to reduce her theory to practice, with you. She failed—as women under such circumstances, always have failed, always do, and always will fail!”

“Well Honoria let it be a mutual confession. I admit, I do think Miss Wildgoose forward, unladylike, unfeminine.”

“Exactly! An instinctive feeling taught me, she was wrong, even when I was totally unable to refute her absurd sophistries. And I proved it so. Observe, papa! Miss Wildgoose is still, what men call a fine woman. She is about fifteen years your junior. In age, and some other respects, she is well suited to you. Had she been also modest,

quiet, retiring, she would very probably, have attracted you. And do you think, my dear papa, that had you fixed your affections on a good woman, calculated to make you happy—that you would have ever heard one word of objection from me?”

“You might have acquiesced, Honoria, but you would not have welcomed a step-mother. No daughter ever does like a step-mother.”

“But dear papa, I saw you living singly, contentedly, for so many years, and all for my sake. I often pitied you. Could you have found a suitable mate, I would not only have acquiesced, but cordially welcomed a step-mother. And I may yet do so. Then, you will see whether my words are empty protestations. But to pursue my contrast. Miss Wildgoose then, with everything in her favour, pursued her singular system. She laid aside woman’s natural modesty. She showed her partiality for you, directly, frankly, upon every occasion. She behaved exactly, as a simple straightforward male lover does. Far from making any attempt to conceal her affection, she obtruded it officiously, in season, and out of season. In short, papa, to use an expressive vulgarism, Miss Wildgoose, not satisfied with the old-fashioned feminine way of setting her cap at you, actually flung herself at your head! I never saw her throw herself into your arms, but I have seen her leaning heavily on your

shoulder; and I should say, she was not a light weight!

The Earl laughed heartily, and when he could speak, said "No indeed!"

"Miss Wildgoose thrust herself upon you, talked with you, talked at you, monopolised you, as far as she could; pursued most consistently, her own novel system of making love—and *failed*. I saw that you were weary of her, long before that fatal exhibition of herself on the hustings, filled up the measure of your disgust."

"You are perfectly right, my love. My sense of the duties of hospitality was sometimes fairly taxed, to prevent me from ordering her out of my house, in the emphatic language of Sir Peter Teazle."

"Well, papa, I, a 'weak-minded' woman, did not copy the example of the 'strong-minded' woman. I pursued a totally different system with the Curate. *I* did not make love directly. But there are a hundred little feminine artifices, by which a young and pretty woman, is always, more or less, making love—habitually, mechanically, sometimes unconsciously to herself—in the most sure and fatal fashion—because insidious, and indirect! I practised all these. I was an adept in the art and science of—*Flirtation*! Miss Wildgoose was occupied with what Mr. Spry called, her own little game of fixing you. Yet even she was not so engrossed, but that she perceived my system, so totally

different from her own. You remember the scene at breakfast, the second day after the Curate dined with us. Miss Wildgoose openly taxed me with my coquetry. She, a middle-aged woman, fulsomely pursuing you, dared to reproach me, with encouraging the Curate! You were provoked to join in the conversation. She grossly insulted me, by quoting, and by identifying me with Lady Clara Vere de Vere; substituting the word Curate, for Yeoman." [Book II., Chapter IV.]

"I remember it distinctly, and how well you kept your temper."

"Well, papa, my plan succeeded. Without encouragement, the Curate would never have fallen in love with me. In her own rude fashion, Miss Wildgoose stated the simple truth. I did give the Curate unfair encouragement. But for that, he would never have dreamed of lifting his eyes to me. I sinned too, in spite of fair warning: my own conscience, Miss Wildgoose, and another—a still more solemn warning. Do you know, papa, when I had been playing with the Curate's affections, about a month, his mother called upon me, and asked me to give him up."

The Earl interrupted, "A most unwarrantable intrusion."

"I tried to think so, then, papa. But somehow, the truth of her words cut me to the heart. I was persuaded to give him up. But my evil genius, Pride, prevented me. I persisted. Though Mrs. Weatherall's last

words actually frightened me. She said : ‘ If you persist in dealing falsely with my son, *some serious calamity will happen to you.*’ Papa, these words were prophetic. I have been rightly served. I have received what is called poetical justice ! I began to flirt with the Curate, indifferent to, in fact, despising him, and disliking him. I intended to make him fond of me. And when he was entangled, I would have dismissed him, to suffer the pangs of unrequited love. Is there any worse form of moral torture ? Yet, papa, this was my scheme of punishment for the Curate, simply for discharging his duty as a Christian minister. He had preached against cruelty in high places. He had done what not one clergymen in a thousand, has the moral courage to do ! That was my deliberate scheme of revenge, planned, and actually executed, by a highly-nurtured Christian young lady of rank ! I had reason to loathe myself, more than the ancient Israelite leper, condemned to wander from out the Camp, and cry ‘ Unclean, Unclean !’ I was justly punished. To speak solemnly, papa, I consider the loss of my eye, the judgment of a righteous God ! It was inflicted in the very moment of my supposed triumph, when I was heartlessly exhibiting the Curate, in the very act of eating his words ! I was punished by his hand—his involuntary act——”

After a pause, Lady Honoria continued : “ Listen, dear papa, I have more to tell. I was

terribly punished, though I knew it not then. You and I gave way to feelings of indignation against a worthy, innocent man. We both behaved meanly. You permitted the time-serving Rector to dismiss Mr. Weatherall from his curacy. We broke off all intercourse with the Curate, returned the letters he wrote to explain, and ask pardon. But, papa, I was to be still more severely punished. I had an interview with the Curate, on the scene of the accident. But previously, the wretch Blackadder had intruded himself into my presence. I will not unnecessarily exasperate you, by detailing his base revenge. He rejoiced in my accident. He did more. He prepared a truly infernal vengeance. He told me the Curate had wounded me intentionally, to make me his own—to hinder me from marrying anyone else.”

“You believed the false traitor?”

“Yes, papa, I did. That explains my cruel injustice, to which I have already alluded. Some allowance must be made for the irritation of my temper. But I had no time to reflect. Blackadder departed. He was immediately succeeded by the Curate. The poor man fell at my feet, and implored my pardon, with tears. I spurned him from me, with rage and contempt. I hurled at him the false accusation, which I temporarily believed, in Blackadder’s very words. I told the Curate, I knew he had marked me for his own! I saw his agony. I have since won-

dered he did not drop dead! He asked me to pray for his soul. He staggered out of sight. Conscience urged me to follow, and give him one word of hope. Pride made me sit still. Demons were tugging at my heart-strings. Oh, papa! in less than one hour after leaving me, the Curate attempted suicide!"

The Earl started up, and exclaimed: "But how do you know all this?"

"The Curate was followed by Blackadder, rejoicing like an incarnate fiend, in his victim's despair. Mr. Weatherall was temporarily insane. Providentially, his Mother had followed him. He was about throwing himself into the deepest part of the lake. She intercepted him. He struggled frantically with her, until she fainted. Then, he came to himself. Papa, had the Curate drowned himself, I should have known myself to be his murderess!"

"This is very terrible, my love. But how did you learn all these facts?"

"From Mrs. Blackadder. She found out about her husband's guilty secrets. He has since, as you know, deserted her. She now has every reason to know him as the worst of men."

"Are you sure she is not in league with her worthless husband, to deceive you still?"

"Papa, I would stake my existence on Matilda's repentance. What better proof of her sincerity, than her confession? What

possible motive could she have, thus to expose her husband's real character, but remorse for having once been his dupe, and confederate?"

"Well, Honoria, if she speaks truth, we are indebted to her, for warning us against further machinations of a monster. Now, my love, have you told me all?"

"No, papa, I cannot bear to hide anything from you. In trying to make the Curate love me, I overreached myself, as Coquettes and Flirts sometimes do. I grew gradually interested in him. I became proud of him, when I saw the vast improvement he made, under my tuition. How quickly he learned the manners of good society. Last, but not least, how well he rode to hounds. And—I fear—I lost my own heart——"

She stopped, blushed, and hesitated.

"Tell me no more, love, unless you wish."

"I shall never be happy, till you know all. You remember our last hunting day, the 10th of April, more than two years ago. The day we were so late. That day, the Curate and I took refuge at Farmer Harrow's, from the storm. We rode home by moonlight. On that occasion he found courage to own his love, and papa, I did not hide from him that it was reciprocated; and—we—engaged ourselves!"

"Indeed! That fully accounts for your nervous hysterical state, when I found you at the gate."

“Not altogether, papa. Something else had happened. Some wretch fired at us, as we passed along Avenue Road. The Curate’s hat was riddled by the bullet.”

“You tell me this for the first time!”

“I was wrong to hide it from you, papa. But I could not very well tell one circumstance, without the other.”

“Have you no suspicion, who attempted the Curate’s life?”

“I at once suspected Blackadder. I warned Mr. Weatherall against such a deadly enemy.”

“You did right there. But why should Blackadder have attempted the Curate’s life?”

“I will not confess by halves. Blackadder had the audacity to be jealous of the Curate.”

“You don’t mean to say that vulgar plebeian ever dared to——”

“Yes, papa, Blackadder once forgot himself so far, as to address the language of compliment, to me. I put him down in such a way, that he never dared to repeat the offence. That made him my mortal enemy. He was the prime mover in the whole chain of intrigue. Fancying the Curate, a favoured lover, he tried to kill him.”

“Ha!” cried the Earl, “I have it! Blackadder threw the cracker which struck the Curate, and caused your accident. Come, have I not guessed right?”

After a slight hesitation, Lady Honoria said: "Well, papa, you have guessed right. It was Blackadder. He told his wife. More than that, a Gipsy woman recognised Blackadder, disguised in the crowd, in the very act of throwing the rocket, or cracker——"

"Where is that gipsy woman? She must be found. I will set detectives at work. I will unearth the miscreant, if he is above ground. I will prosecute, and punish him."

"Indeed, papa, if you reflect coolly, you will do nothing of the sort. Employing detectives, causes much worry, and expense. We have no money to throw away. And suppose you succeeded, got the witness, and proved that Blackadder threw the cracker. You never could make him legally responsible for the loss of my eye. He would either escape all together, or receive a slight punishment. Leave him to the stings of his own conscience. It must, sooner or later, awake."

"I will do nothing rashly. You may be right. About the Curate, I feel that I have treated him ill."

"But *I* have treated him far worse than you. He must despise me now."

"Well, my love, I shall soon be in a position to do him some service. He is not in difficulties now. Stedfast told us, he had repaid every penny of a loan advanced before leaving Laxington. Mr. Weatherall has, I think, a curacy, or a benefice, somewhere in

South London. He may be a neighbour. You look very conscious Honoria! Have you anything more to confess?"

"Well, nothing very serious, papa. You know I have been in the habit of attending Sunday evening service, alone. Not at the church where we go in the morning. At another church, only in the next street. The preacher is Mr. Weatherall."

The Earl said "Indeed!" without seeming much astonished.

"No unworthy motives led me there Papa. All is over now, between me and Mr. Weatherall. Besides," she added, with charming inconsistency, "he has no idea that I am one of his congregation. I never remove my veil!"

The Earl smiled and said: "Do you mean that the Curate is as unworthy, as your precious cousin, who could slight you, for the loss of an eye? If Mr. Weatherall is like that, he is no more to be regretted, than other admirers."

"Oh no, papa, I don't mean that. The Curate is incapable of such conduct. He remained faithful and true, when all my professed adorers failed, and fell short of my ideal. He wished to love me even after I had insulted him. I hoped that after my gross treatment of him, after our joint injustice to him, the dignity of his manhood would enable him to conquer his love. I confess, I went to hear him preach, to be satisfied that in devo-

tion to duty, he had conquered an unworthy attachment."

"An unworthy attachment! What can you mean, Honoria?"

"That I am altogether unworthy to be the wife of so good a man."

"My love, you are very romantic. Two years ago, this wonderfully good man, had earned the appropriate nickname of *The Wild Curate*! Though a lover of Sport, I think a clergyman might find employment more suitable, than hunting!"

"Especially, when mounted on Saladin!" said Lady Honoria archly. "Well, papa; All that is changed. Hunting is over, both for the Curate, and myself. He has bitterly repented of all the follies which we—which I led him into. And now—he is such an eloquent preacher!"

"Hum! I should be a more critical hearer, perhaps than you."

"Will you come, and hear him, next Sunday evening papa?"

"But my dear, I cannot wear a veil! The Curate might recognise me, and then, *you* will no longer be unknown."

"I really believe, papa, you knew all along, where I went, on Sunday evenings."

"I had my suspicions, love."

The Earl did accompany his daughter, next Sunday evening. He was very much impressed by the Curate's sermon. The Earl began to appreciate Mr. Weatherall. His

lordship had hitherto underrated, and somewhat despised the Curate, for eating his own words, and for being so soon induced to follow the Sports, he had condemned from the pulpit. But Lady Honoria's confession had put the matter in an entirely new light. The Earl now perceived, that the Curate had been completely bewitched, and fascinated by Lady Honoria. He had acted as men in love, almost always do. He had surrendered at discretion. He had abandoned will, principles, judgment, to the dictates of proud, imperious Beauty. And Lady Honoria was certainly far more to blame than "The Wild Curate." The Earl now saw the Curate restored to his right mind, repentant, striving to banish his own trouble, by doing his Master's work. That Lady Honoria still loved the Curate, was quite apparent to the Earl. And he now asked himself seriously, whether he could find a better son-in-law. This, and the consciousness of the gross injustice, the Curate had suffered, determined the Earl, to lose no time in making all the reparation in his power. He accordingly wrote the Curate, a gentlemanly considerate Christian letter. The writer offered his sincere apologies for ill-treatment, which, he admitted, could not be justified, but only extenuated, by his very natural excitement, at the accident to his daughter. He knew the Curate had a right to be offended. But, the writer hoped that the Curate would

forgive and forget, and show by the renewal of their friendship, that he accepted the Earl's apology.

The chief cause of all quarrels and estrangements, is, that the offender altogether, or most in the wrong, will never apologise! *Moral progress stands still, because not one in ten thousand, will admit that he or she, has done wrong!* We can imagine the Curate's gratification at this letter, because it was totally unexpected. That so great a man as an Earl, should voluntarily apologise to a poor, dismissed, disgraced, and ruined Curate, is an incident only to be found in a Novel! The Curate answered in the same Christian spirit. He thanked the Earl for doing him justice. The Christian in fact, and not merely in name, truthfully stated that he had long since forgiven the Earl, and would cordially give this assurance in person. The Earl called on the Curate. The reconciliation between them, was complete. It remained to bring about that between the former lovers. This was a more delicate matter. The Curate believed Lady Honoria hated him. Lady Honoria thought he despised her. There was also the difficulty between the two ladies. Mrs. Weatherall could not be expected, to make the first advances towards Lady Honoria. But where there's a will there's a way. Lady Honoria wrote, asking forgiveness, for her unworthy conduct at the memorable visit. (Book III.

Chapter I.) The reference to Mrs. Weatherall's prophetic warning, being fulfilled by the loss of the writer's eye, made the reader weep. The worthy old lady was glad to assure her correspondent, that all cause of offence had long been forgiven, and forgotten. A dinner-invitation to Mrs. Weatherall and her son, was frankly accepted. The awkwardness of a first meeting between the lovers, was thus diminished. Mrs. Weatherall declared she had not for many years, spent a pleasanter evening. She had no idea that the Earl was such an affable, pleasant-like man!

"And, William!" added the old lady, "to hear you, and Lady Honoria, chatting and laughing together, one would think you had always been the best of friends."

"Mother! The Latin Poet had a thorough knowledge of the universal passion, when he wrote: '*Amantium ira amoris redintegratio est.*'"

"What does that mean?"

"The quarrels of lovers, are the renewal of Love!"

CHAPTER V.

MR. FORRESTER'S CLEVER MARRIAGE!—LAXINGTON'S NEW RECTOR.—LADY HONORIA'S BIBLE-CLASS.—THE WEDDING.—BLACKADDER'S FATE.—YANKEE CURIOSITY.—CONCLUSION!

THE third year of the Earl's exile, brought changes which must be recorded. The Rector and Mr. Gnatstrainer both died suddenly, within a week. The Rector had never been popular. But since his gross act of intemperate rage, venting itself, on his son's favourite animals; Mr. Headlong had been sent to Coventry, or as we now call it, "boycotted." The Rector attempted to retaliate his parishoners' contempt, in all possible ways. He preached at, talked at, wrote letters at them in the local papers. He declared his parishioners, a set of low vulgar plebeians, utterly unworthy of such a superfine Aristocratic pastor, and signified his intention of leaving them to themselves, and taking no further trouble about them.* Wicked wags

* The Rector of a parish, many years since, actually published a letter to this effect!

wondered at the Rector's illusion, that he had ever troubled himself, about his parishoners ! But popular contempt is not easy to bear. It began to be whispered, that the Rector was gnawed by the vulture of conscience. He vainly attempted to banish remorse, by drink. At last, he became lost to all sense of shame. He was seen intoxicated in day-light. One day, he dropped dead, in a fit of apoplexy.

Mr. Gnatstrainer had been holding forth, longer, louder, more violently, and more virulently, than usual. His congregation were rivetted by his eloquence. The majority (being fanatics) considered his diatribes against all Christians, but his own Sect, as *Inspiration* ! Suddenly, the preacher fell down in a fit, foaming at the mouth ! He partially recovered. But he died in a few hours, raving mad ! In vain, did his fellow-worshippers attempt to hush up the awful facts ! In vain, did they industriously circulate the report, that the Calvinist had made a most edifying end, and died in a state of grace. The falsehood was palpable. A totally different opinion was entertained by the doctors, who made a *post-mortem* examination, and found half-a-pint of raw spirits in the stomach of the deceased. And this opinion, that death had been accelerated, if not caused, by immoderate drinking of ardent spirits, was shared by the Coroner's Jury.

The truth was simply this. Mr. Gnatstrainer, not being an idiot, began to doubt

his own infallibility, and the truth of his Calvinistic principles. Conscience awoke, as it does, sooner or later, even in religious hypocrites, and enthusiasts. He had boasted of "the open Bible." How had he used it, all his life? He had twisted, perverted, and abused it, as an instrument to damn all Christians, except himself and Sect. At last, his theology proved too strong for himself.* The illiterate narrow-minded Fanatic, had constituted himself a teacher of Holy Mysteries. He had called himself a vessel of grace; one of God's Elect. He had held himself up as a pattern to the world; as one already saved! He began at last, not merely to doubt of his own salvation. He went from one extreme to the other. He now despaired of salvation, and believed himself doomed to eternal perdition. It was too late now, for the self-appointed Teacher to fulfil Christ's injunction, to become again like a little child, and learn true Christianity!

The self-righteous Pharisee, the teetotaller, took to drink, not openly and socially, but as a private stimulant, a secret sin. The Calvinist still preached the doctrines he disbelieved. Just as so many Atheist-lecturers in old age, tell their deluded hearers, they have never changed their opinions! That

* Of the Fanatics of his day, Dryden writes:—"Since the Bible has been translated, they have used it so, as if their business was not to be saved, but to be damned by its contents." Preface to "*Religio Laici*."

they still say, in their hearts, there is no God, and are consistently old fools, to the end of the chapter! There is little to choose between the Calvinistic Gnatstrainer, and the platform Atheist. The latter is preferable. Better to deny—than to libel God! Fanatics thought Gnatstrainer's sermons—(delivered in a semi-intoxicated state)—his most powerful, and best. They were so, tried by Selden's test: "To preach long, loud, and damnation, is the way to be cry'd up. We love a man that damns us, and we run after him again to save us." The man "already saved," had, as usual, a superstitious dread of Death! Mr. Gnatstrainer had never made a Will, lest he should die, immediately after! He had amassed £75,000 by every form of theft, which can be legally practised by so-called "Christian" traders! The deceased "Saint" left a wife and two legitimate children. His correspondence showed that he had also left *eleven* illegitimate children, whose paternity he did not dispute! This fact shocked some of his admirers. Yet it was not in the least inconsistent with Mr. Gnatstrainer's Calvinistic faith. He had declared that he was assured of Salvation, even if he had died in the commission of adultery, or murder! The deceased's large fortune was equally divided between his widow, and two children. So that young Mr. Headlong did, after all, marry an heiress, who brought him £25,000, besides expectations at her mother's death. Greatly

to his own, and wife's credit, they provided liberally for all of the Calvinistic Saint's illegitimate children.

The Earl's tenant, the wealthy Mr. Ringold, paid the handsome rent for two years. Then, current reports affecting Mr. Ringold's credit, caused Mr. Oldstyle some uneasiness. They proved not devoid of foundation. The very rich man suddenly collapsed ; or, as Mr. Spry would say, "bust up," and became a bankrupt. Others, besides creditors, were ruined. The Earl's nephew had followed his clever mother's advice. He had struck up an acquaintance with Mr. Ringold. For this, there were various reasons. Mrs. Forrester wished her son to break off the engagement with his cousin ; but felt indignant and humiliated, at the manner in which it was done. The cub of quality, of course, gave a one-sided version to his mother. She vowed to be revenged on the Earl, for insulting her son ; and to take down Lady Honoria's supercilious pride. In the first ebullition of her spite, Mrs. Forrester wrote a most insulting letter to the Earl, and Lady Honoria. Of this, neither took any notice. Whatever the motive—silent contempt, or Christian forgiveness, this ignoring of her letter, mortified Mrs. Forrester far more, than any possible reply could have done—more even, than if her own letter had been returned to her. The act of sending back a letter to its writer, is certainly preferable to returning railing for railing.

Yet returning a letter, shows that the recipient is annoyed. Note this, intelligent reader, and act accordingly.

The clever, but angry lady's next move, was to strike up a close friendship with the tenant of Laxington House. Mr. Ringold, the capitalist, had an only child, a daughter, reputed a beauty, and, of course, an heiress. Miss Ringold would be a much more eligible match for Mr. Forrester, than his one-eyed *lady* cousin, with her paltry £200 per annum! Mrs. Forrester now revelled in the hospitality of Laxington House, which the Earl had doled out to *her* at least, in such a niggardly spirit. She, and her son, could also, by personal inspection, satisfy themselves, as to the actual state of the property, to the extent at least, of felling timber, exhaustion of land, and other visible injuries. Mrs. Forrester and her son called on Mr. and Miss Ringold. The visitors were cordially received, and hospitably entertained. The acquaintance, mutually agreeable, ripened into friendship. The heiress and the future Earl of Laxington, fancied themselves in love, and did not discover their mistake till too late. The lady despised her husband, as an aristocratic fool. He had very good reason to believe that his wife had never loved him, that her affections were pre-engaged; that she had married him, for the title and estate, which might be his, if he outlived his uncle.

Mr. Forrester complained to his mother, of

this bad treatment. He never, of course, reflected that it was precisely what he had deserved. He had behaved no better to the lady, whom he had married for her money. Still it was some consolation, that he had married an *heiress*! He would come into untold wealth, at the death of "the old man." This hope was dissipated, when Mr. Ringold's name appeared in the "Gazette." Paper in hand, Mr. Forrester burst into his wife's *boudoir*. He read out the announcement of her father's failure. Then, the Honourable relieved his feelings, by cursing, swearing; and overwhelmed his wife with reproaches.

Justly indignant at such brutality, she smartly replied, and showed herself more than his match, in neatness, fertility, and copiousness of invective. "Is it my fault, you great brutal booby? Am I responsible, because my father is unfortunate in business?"

"Yes, you are. You knew all along, that your father was a rash speculator, and no capitalist; but living on credit. You were in league with the old rogue, to inveigle, betray, and swindle me."

If a woman's glance could kill, Mr. Forrester would have fallen dead. Even he temporarily quailed before the blaze of fury, he had invoked.

"Leave my private room, sir. Go, and blow off your steam, and vent your brutal rage, among your own choice set of friends,

grooms, jockeys, trainers, touts, blacklegs, and other congenial spirits."

Somewhat abashed at the storm he had raised, Mr. Forrester muttered that it was "doosed hard to lose the fortune a fella expected in his wife."

"Which fortune, you would have squandered upon the turf, or upon your *harem*, your private—or rather your *public* misses; leaving your *wife* without the comforts and necessities of life. You see how thoroughly I know you already. Though we have not been married a year. Do you think life with *you* so pleasant, that I can dispense with the luxuries to which I have been accustomed?"

"If you are tired of living with me, go whenever you like, back to your former lover." Forrester in a fury, left the room, and banged the door after him!

He went to his mother for consolation. She could give none. He asked her to go and expostulate with his wife. The elder lady prudently declined. Mother and daughter-in-law never met, without a quarrel. It was even said that their quarrels were not confined to words. That the ladies had even tested the quality of each other's *chevelures*. Matters came to a crisis, by the younger Mrs. Forrester leaving her husband's house, in the course of the day. On her toilet-table, lay a note addressed to her husband. These were its laconic contents:—"I take you at your word. I have long been tired of living with

a *brute*, and a *fool*. If you make any attempt to recapture me, I will get a protection-order from a magistrate. I can truly swear that I went in fear of my life from you."

Ostensibly, Mrs. Forrester was living with her father, whose affairs were in the bankruptcy court. Her husband chose to believe his wife had taken his advice, and returned to a former lover. Mr. Forrester was paying heavy fees, to a private detective, for such information respecting Mrs. Forrester, junior, as might enable the husband to obtain a divorce. Such was the result of the marriage of convenience made by the *clever mother*, chiefly in hopes of annoying the Earl, and Lady Honoria!

The chimes of Laxington Parish Church rang merrily, on two occasions, within a month of each other. Firstly, for the installation of the new Rector. He had been well known in Laxington, in a double character, as an earnest preacher, and hard worker. Also, as "The Wild Curate." Secondly, for the return of the Earl of Laxington and daughter to their Estate, now redeemed from debt, and rightfully theirs. Well might the bells ring. Well might the tenantry welcome back their landlord and his daughter, after three years' absence. For never had Laxington received a better lord of the manor, and a better Rector. The pleasing truth could not be known at first. But time proved it beyond doubt, or cavil. The Earl was no longer M.F.H. He was no longer the free, careless liver, wasting his substance on

parasites, keeping open house, never looking into his affairs ; but grasping his rents. The Earl now turned over a new leaf. He went over his accounts, and made his expenditure fall well within his income. What a mistake to call a spendthrift generous. He cannot even be *just* ! The Earl was now enabled to carry on extensive improvements ; to keep the able-bodied poor in remunerative occupation ; to grant time, and abatement of rent, to honest tenants in difficulties. He was able to do more. He looked after the poor on his estate, and beyond it. The Earl now practised true *Hospitality*. It consists not in feasting the rich, who feast in return, but in relieving the wants of the poor, who can make no return in kind. The eyes of that practical Christian philanthropist, Mr. Stedfast, filled with tears, as he met the Earl and his daughter visiting the poor tenantry, on their estate. Not in their former style. Not now getting down from spirited horses, held by supercilious grooms, to pay perfunctory visits, which did no good, but only vexed and annoyed their recipients. Oh no ! Lady Honoria could truly say, "*Nous avons changé tout cela.*" She, and the Earl, now preferred walking. They took good long constitucionals, and trudged round their estate, frequently attended by a sumpter-horse carrying provisions for distribution. The Earl and his daughter visited cottages, without state, or ceremony, beyond that of knocking at the door of the poor man's

castle. That was seldom necessary. For flying scouts of light infantry, in the shape of happy children, ran before, and heralded the approach of the good landlord and his daughter. Doors flew open. Occupants appeared on thresholds, with looks, and words of welcome, and sometimes with hearty grasps of hands.

His tenantry loved the Earl. Lady Honoria, they positively *adored*! The accident, the "*calamity*," had changed her, in two ways. It had diminished her personal beauty. But just in proportion, as her perishable leveliness had decreased, her moral charms were increased. She had been in training, for a hollow, heartless worldling. Her "*calamity*" turned her into a genuine practical Christian. Lady Honoria had been considered by the poor, as haughty, conceited, "stuck-up." She had rarely visited poor cottages. And when she did, her visits were not welcomed, but tolerated, and rather resented. They wanted that indication of Christian Love. Now, none knew her better than the poor. They regarded her as almost an angel, a saint. She was neither one, nor the other. She was simply, neither more nor less, than that nearest approach to perfectibility, attainable by humanity—a really good woman—in training to become a saint and angel. Some people said, "Lady Honoria never ought to marry. No man is good enough for her." Others thought differently. There was only one man good

enough for her. Oddly enough, he was the man whom she had tried to humiliate. By a singular dispensation of Providence, he had been made the instrument of marring her earthly beauty, and thus turning a Flirt into one of the best of women! Lady Honoria used to ride out hunting with "The Wild Curate." What a change had taken place in both! She, and the young Rector still hunted in couples, but in a very different fashion. Wherever a good work was to be done in the parish, there were Lady Honoria and the Rector. Sometimes they met. And often they departed together!

Among the many good works inaugurated, and supported, by Lady Honoria, one deserves special mention. A Bible-class for male adults! She invited great, rough, hulking men, street-corner loungers, the "ne'er-do-weels" of Laxington, to religious exercises, twice a week, at the Church school-room. Wonderful to relate, these men (pests, torments, and terrors to their neighbours) did come. Most of them came at first, to scoff, jeer, and ridicule the young lady, who cared for their souls, and tried to convert them. If Lady Honoria had attempted to instruct them, in the "Pardiggle" style, they would have persisted in hardening their hearts, and the plan must have collapsed. But Lady Honoria softened the hardest heart. Her manner was unaffected. Her address was hearty, and friendly, without being

patronising. These rough fellows were taken by surprise, when she said, in her clear dulcet tones, without affected pronunciation : "Friends! we will now read together, the lessons for the day. Then, we will sing a hymn, and finish with prayer." She read a chapter from the Old, and one from the New Testament. She used a Bible with marginal references. She always stopped to give the meaning of proper names, and to explain obscure passages. So that sometimes, she would unconsciously deliver a little homily. Thus, she really interested, and instructed. The chapters finished, she selected a suitable hymn. She began it alone. Her sweet and cultivated voice sounded like a strain of heavenly harmony. Diffident at first, one after another, joined, till all sang together. Now and then, some rough man, conscience-stricken, would falter, break down, and weep. When their hearts were touched, and souls raised somewhat above Earth, Lady Honoria knelt, and offered up a brief, but eloquent, because unconsciously impassioned prayer. She lifted their souls nearer Heaven, than they had ever been before. Then they repeated The Lord's Prayer. The service ended with a Collect, and other Church prayers. Afterwards, Lady Honoria had, what she called, her confessional. No kneeling down. No prying into conscience. She said, "Now friends, if you have any little troubles I can alleviate, tell me frankly."

One was behind with his rent. One had illness in his home. Another had come to the end of his resources. She listened patiently. She relieved all with money, and advice. They really seemed to prefer the latter. And what is more, they did not deceive her!

Some District Visitors thought Lady Honoria carried her Christian humility too far. Our old friend, Miss Straitlace, thought it disgustingly indelicate, in Lady Honoria to sit alone, with a parcel of great rough he-creatures! Mrs. Colonel Driver thought it her duty to hint to the Earl, that for Lady Honoria to trust herself all alone, with a class of rough men, was unbecoming, and not altogether safe. The Earl came to judge for himself. He was shocked, startled, and positively alarmed, at seeing his daughter, the only woman there, surrounded by these rugged, unkempt, uncouth, ragged men. The Earl spoke to the Rector, and said: "Really, Mr. Weatherall, I don't like this."

"What, my lord?"

"The idea of my daughter sitting all alone, surrounded by these great rough men."

"Well, my lord, to confess the truth, I don't altogether like it myself. I have hinted the danger, to Lady Honoria. But she made light of it."

"But Mr. Weatherall, you should not permit it. Good Heavens! Suppose anything happened to my child, any insult, or injury—"

"Oh, my lord, we are at cross purposes. You misunderstand me. I don't in the least fear upon Lady Honoria's account."

"No—what then? Some of them look very desperate characters."

"Not one of them would hurt a hair of her head."

"But you spoke of danger. What is it then you fear?"

"My apprehension is of a totally different character. These rough men idolise Lady Honoria to such an extent, that they would not stop at *murder*, to save her from insult—far less, injury! My dread is, lest any rough fellow whom she has not reclaimed, were to come in and attempt any 'chaff'; they might give him fatal treatment."

"What? they would soon bundle him out, I suppose."

"Oh, my lord, far worse than that. They would attack him—and if not stopped—I verily believe, they would tear him limb from limb." *

The Earl gazed in surprise.

"You can hardly believe me. No wonder! But let me tell your lordship, what actually happened. You noticed perhaps, one man—the biggest—Bill Belcher——"

"Why, I have heard of him, as the biggest blackguard in Laxington."

* Strange as may appear this incident; it is substantially identical with a relation once made in a speech, by the late Earl of Shaftesbury. What follows, is a little embellishment.

“I fear he did merit his reputation. Well, my lord, Bill Belcher was the last to come in. He had been the ringleader, and most hardened among them. He stood out to the very last. And when he did come, it was only to sneer, jeer, and interrupt the proceedings. I believe he had been heard to boast that he could break up the ‘snivelling,’ and get his ‘pals’ back again. Well, Bill Belcher stood near the door, and grinned. They would have put him out at once. But they obeyed a signal from Lady Honoria, and went on with the service. She hoped he would become ashamed of himself. But he still kept interrupting. They bore with him, until they came to sing. And then, Bill set up a howl, which drowned their voices. Lady Honoria said: ‘My good man, if you will not join in our service, you have no right to interrupt. Be silent, or withdraw.’ He made an insolent answer. Lady Honoria repeated her request. Bill grew more insolent. Till at last, he said ‘He wasn’t going to be ordered about, by any one-eyed blooming beauty.’ That was enough. Lady Honoria could no longer restrain them. They rushed at him, like a pack of hounds. Fortunately, I heard the uproar. I came up just in time. They had got Bill down. They were kicking him. I dragged two or three off, by main force. I stood between them, and their prey, at the risk of my life. Eventually, I saved the man. I saw the poor

bleeding wretch safely off, under charge of the police. Then, I asked: 'Men! what means this savage assault on a fellow workman?' 'He deserves all he's got. He didn't get half enough. He was rude to Lady Honoria!' They thought that quite a sufficient reason, for nearly murdering him! 'O men!' said Lady Honoria, 'you call yourselves Christians! You should forgive your enemies. That man never injured you.' 'He insulted your ladyship.' 'I freely forgive him. So must you.' They demurred to this. But they readily asked Lady Honoria's pardon. It was singular to see those men, shortly before, like raging wolves, now like lambs, meek and penitent, before one gentle woman! Lady Honoria said: 'Remember, whoever attacks that man again, shall leave my class.' She persuaded them to forgive him, to seek him out, and ask pardon, for their violence. And poor Bill was so affected by the lesson he had received, that he came, and asked Lady Honoria's pardon. He joined the class, and now he's like the rest, ready to spring like a tiger, on any one who should insult Lady Honoria. In everything else, they obey. Only in this one thing, they slip out of hand."

Six months after the return of the Earl, and his daughter, to Laxington, were celebrated the nuptials of Lady Honoria, and the Rector. Even if the Bride's rank could have permitted, the ceremony would not have

been a quiet one. For, independently of the guests invited, the popularity of Bride and Bridegroom, rendered their union a public event. The excitement was immense. Laxington was *en fete*. It was a general holiday. Shops were closed. All business suspended. Triumphal arches spanned the High Street. All were more or less affected, by the hearty and spontaneous enthusiasm—more especially of the working-classes. Most affecting of all, was the frequent repetition of “God bless you, my lady! God bless you, Mr. Weatherall!” from the rugged men, whom Lady Honoria had been instrumental in bringing to Christ! They, their wives, and children, helped to swell the throng, and cheered, when the Bride and Bridegroom came forth. But some were too much affected to cheer, or even speak. This real marriage of two congenial lovers (who had been temporarily sundered) elicited sincere congratulations from all classes. It was a marriage of disinterested affection, on both sides. One of those rare unions in which bride and bridegroom are equally *pure*. “Happy is the bride the sun shines on.” Better even than sunshine, are the love and gratitude of thousands. Impossible to have a wedding, under happier auspices.

The hero and heroine being now united, my story might end. Yet experienced novel-readers naturally desire to learn something more, respecting the Villain, who had

sundered them so long. Such laudable curiosity shall be gratified. Though I thereby somewhat anticipate in point of time, the conclusion of my story. Blackadder's fate formed the most striking instance of retributive justice. He could not hope to escape that persistent Goddess, whom Byron so beautifully apostrophises:

“And thou, who never yet, of human wrong
Lost the unbalanced scale, great Nemesis!”

“Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days.” Blackadder was a murderer, in intention, even if he had never shed blood. Such a man could not continue to prosper. His sins found him out, and were instrumental in his punishment. As Mrs. Blackadder told the Curate, the Gipsy had discovered Blackadder in London. She had threatened to accuse him of his crimes, and had been bribed to hold her tongue. (Book VI., Chapter III.) To prevent a repetition of threat and bribe, Blackadder had deserted his wife and child, and so far as possible, effaced himself. But he could not long conceal himself from the Gipsy. She was Argus-eyed. For she searched not singly, but with her tribe. Turn and wind, as he chose, Blackadder was never able to hide himself long from their united vigilance. Sooner or later, he was brought to bay. And then, he was squeezed of all his ready money. He was compelled to bribe

again, and again. If he attempted to bully, he was silenced by the threat: "I will go to the police." If he tried his former "chaff," one of the Gipsy's sons, a tall strapping fellow, shook his fist in Blackadder's face, and bade him keep a civil tongue in his head! Blackadder's life became intolerable. He had no stimulus to get money, when what he got, did not remain his own. At last he sunk to be the accomplice of his persecutors. He formed one of a gang of thimble-riggers, tramping through the country, to fairs and races. What a life for a man of ability, and education—a classical scholar, who had held intercourse with good Society!

Once more, Blackadder made his escape from his tormentors. Destiny brought him to Laxington. A seedy-looking, wretched, ragged man, was seen slinking through the High Street. The eventide of the day, corresponded with the eventide of his life. Never seen in daylight, he came out in twilight, with owls and bats. In the prime of life, as to years, but prematurely aged. His hat slouched over his eyes, partially concealed his face. He was thin to emaciation. So fallen away, so physically altered: No wonder he was not recognised. His schemes of ambition, his crimes, all came to this. A poor, hunted, disreputable vagabond, haunting the place, where he had once lived, with some consideration, and where he might have been happy and respected—had he been *honest*!

Why had Blackadder returned to Laxington? With the hope that his task-masters, the Gipsies, would not be likely to look for him *there*? Or had he some faint idea of applying to his old patron, the Earl, and to the Curate; of confessing his crimes, and appealing to their magnanimity for forgiveness and protection? Had he done so, he would have been not merely pardoned, but helped. He might have begun the world again, turned over a new leaf, retrieved his character, been reconciled to his wife, and known the joys of paternity, and a happy home.

It was not to be. But mark, dear reader; not from perversity in the Author. Such an ending could not be, without violating not merely the canons of literary art; but those moral laws of compensation, which operate with the undeviating accuracy of cause and effect! Blackadder was not repentant. He was an Atheist. He regarded all the Clergy as rogues, or fools. He had tried to murder the Curate. Why do bad men never forgive those whom they injure? This puzzling moral problem is solved by Fielding, thus: "Though the observation, How apt are men to hate those they injure, or how unforgiving they are, to injuries they do themselves, be common; yet I do not remember to have ever seen the reason of this strange phenomenon, as at first it appears. Know, therefore, reader, that with much and severe scrutiny, we have discovered this hatred to

be founded on the passion of fear, and to arise from an apprehension, that the person whom we have greatly injured, will use all possible endeavours to revenge and retaliate the injuries we have done him. An opinion so firmly established, that no benevolence nor even beneficence on the injured side, can eradicate it. On the contrary, they refer all those acts of kindness to imposture, and design of lulling their suspicion, till an opportunity offers of striking a surer and severer blow. And thus while the good man who hath received it, hath truly forgotten the injury, the evil mind which did it, hath it in lively and fresh remembrance. Though as a Christian thou art obliged, and we advise thee to forgive thy enemy; never trust the man who hath reason to suspect that you know he hath injured you." *

One evening, a fanatic named Maggot, was hurrying through the Park, to hear his favourite minister, at Little Bethel. Maggot heard cries of distress, but being a "Christian" of the Gnatstrainer breed, he thought it far more important to hear Mr. Jabez Howler, than to save a human life. Next morning, a corpse was found floating in the deepest part of the lake. It was the body of the miserable tramp. Some letters in a pocket-book were addressed, "Mr. Blackadder." Mrs. Black-

* "The Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild." (Book III., Chapter IV.)

adder was apprised. The body had not been many hours in the water, and was not much swollen. The widow had no difficulty in recognising her deceased husband. The corpse showed no marks of violence. It appeared as if Blackadder had strayed from the path, in the darkness, and fallen accidentally into the water. Strange coincidence in his death by drowning, and on this spot! Four years before, he and Miss Minckes had stood at this part of the lake, just previously to the terrible vengeance so nearly fatal. Here, Blackadder had terrified his affianced wife by rehearsing the imaginary murder of an enemy. Here, the monster had been for the second time morally guilty of the Curate's murder, and had only desisted from the act, in hopes of seeing his victim commit suicide. (Book V., Chapter VI.) Had Maggot held his tongue, no one would have known he had omitted to succour the drowning man. But Maggot chattered. He was accordingly summoned to attend the inquest, and cross-examined. A hint from the Coroner, made him tell all he knew. He had heard cries for "Help" distinctly repeated. Thought the cries came from the direction of the lake. It was a very dark night. Thought it likely some one had fallen into the water. Knew the water was deep enough to drown a man. Had no doubt the person he heard crying for "Help," was the deceased Blackadder!

Coroner: "You heard a drowning man

crying for help. Yet you made no effort to rescue him?"

Maggot: "I always minds my own business. It were no affair of mine. I might have got into trouble. Folks might have accused me of foul play. Besides, I had another reason. I were in a hurry. If I'd 'a lost more time, I'd 'a bin too late to hear our parstor, Rev. Jabez Howler."

Coroner: "Do you call yourself a Christian?"

Maggot: "I should think I did! I am a Christian——"

Coroner: "A pretty Christian! To leave a fellow-creature to drown, rather than miss hearing your favourite preacher! If you were a Christian, you would do good works."

Maggot: "I know I'm saved already. Jabez Howler don't hold with good works."

Coroner: "Then neither you, nor Jabez Howler, understand the Christianity of the Gospel. Have you never heard the Golden Rule? 'Do unto another, as you would another should do unto you.' 'By their fruits ye shall know them.' Christ expressly enjoins good works, by the strongest of all inducements. 'Inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these, you have done it unto me.' 'Love one another.' You showed your love to a fellow-creature, by leaving him to drown, lest you should lose time, in trying to save him, and be too late to hear Mr. Howler's gospel of brimstone! You, a Christian! You

are not a man ! Though the law cannot touch you, I consider you morally guilty, as an accessory before the fact. I am ashamed of you. Leave the Court. Go away ! ” *

* * * * *

Some months after their marriage, the happy couple at the Rectory, were agreeably surprised by a visit from Augustus Julius Cæsar Spry, Esq. The American was now a millionaire, by his fortunate speculations in petroleum. Time was, when Mr. Spry thought an untold pile of dollars would make him respected and happy. He had made his pile. He now found something else indispensable to happiness. A title of nobility. A handle to his name. The grown child would have liked several handles. He had returned to England, not merely to spend money, and astonish the natives. A mere millionaire was nothing extraordinary. He was allured by the prospect of vindicating his title to some British peerage, now in abeyance. He must apply to the Heralds' Office for Ancestry and Arms. Time was required. He had to choose between different degrees of rank. Such a wealthy man could hardly escape marriage. And then he must consult his wife's taste. He considered "Baronet, a one-horse title !" Baron was better. "Dook," and Prince, best

* Some readers will call this incident unnatural. It is a fact !

of all. So the American thought he would confer with the Earl, "The Wild Curate," and other Laxington friends. It will be remembered that Mr. Spry left England, before "The Tournament of Doves" at Laxington Park. He had seen no journals containing an account of Lady Honoria's loss of an eye. And he knew nothing either of the accident, or how it had occurred.

Mr. Spry was evidently much surprised, to find that Lady Honoria Weatherall had suffered such a serious loss. His curiosity was, of course, greatly excited. During dinner, his suddenly averted glances, and the expression of his countenance, told his amused host and hostess, the fearful struggle being waged between the Yankee's natural inquisitiveness, and acquired good-breeding. He burned to ask, directly, or indirectly, how the accident occurred. But the aspirant to a British peerage, the American gentleman proud of his superior manners, and English pronunciation, could not, with propriety, cross-question his host or hostess, on such a delicate subject. If neither referred to it, voluntarily, Mr. Spry must wait till he could get the information elsewhere. That is, if he could wait. But his expressive countenance showed that he could most appropriately have quoted Hamlet: "Let me not burst in ignorance."

The dessert was placed on the table. The servants left the room. With a comical

glance at her husband, Lady Honoria said :
“ Mr. Spry ! ”

The Yankee replied : “ Lady, to you ! ” This was his usual shibboleth, when addressed, to signify that he was all attention, to the person speaking.

Lady Honoria continued :

“ Your countrymen have the reputation of being very inquisitive. We charge our American cousins, justly or unjustly, with being over fond of asking questions. I don’t know whether you admit this, as a National trait, or consider it one of our Insular prejudices.”

“ Wal, now, Lady Honoria—Weatherall, you air right. I calculate I jest du think uz Yankees air about the most curious coons, on the planet.”

“ I admire your candour, Mr. Spry. Your patriotism does not blind you, to your National faults.”

“ My lady, you air a whole team. You du go ahead like Jehu. I reckon Yankee inquisitiveness is not a fault. It shows Brother Jonathan ain’t so proud as John Bull. The Britisher is proverbial for pride. He calls all dark races, niggers. I guess the French prefer the Yankee rapid fire of cross questions to John Bull’s calm, stolid air of supercilious, self-satisfied superiority. We air obtrusive, humorous, loquacious, inquisitive. We du sift strangers, some. But we air sociable. The man who asks questions, don’t despise

strangers, near so much as the man who don't condescend to open his head, except to eat and drink. The Yankee boasts and brags. By his tall talk, he tries to impress his idea of his superiority. The Englishman's silence virtually says: 'My superiority is too self-evident to need assertion or proof.' John Bull is prouder than Brother Jonathan."

"A really ingenious defence of American inquisitiveness, over our Insular bearish silence," said the Rector, laughing.

Lady Honoria observed: "You, Mr. Spry, admit inquisitiveness, as a National characteristic. Yet, you are yourself, apparently without that failing, or virtue, whichever it is."

"Lady! I don't exactly know what you air driving at. But I'll lay something handsome, you air up to some trick, you bet."

"Well, Mr. Spry, is there not a conflict in your mind, between curiosity, and courtesy? Do you not desire to ask a question, yet fear to give offence, by personality?"

The Yankee relieved his feelings, by an expressive action. He intended to slap his thigh, but, by mistake, brought his hand down on the table, instead. The shock made the glasses dance, and spilt his wine.

"Wal," he said, "the way women du look right slick through uz lords of creation, is a caution. I may as well cave in. Lady Honoria reads me like a book. I dry up."

"Then, Mr. Spry, I infer that you would like to learn how I lost my left eye?"

"Lady Honoria, I never would have asked you. But since you alluded to it, I should like to know."

"Well, Mr. Spry, I will make a bargain with you. It is not a pleasant subject; so if I promise to answer one question, will you promise to ask no more?"

"Certainly, my lady."

"To prevent misunderstanding, let us make a fair bargain. You shall ask me how I lost my eye. I will answer your question truthfully. The subject must then drop. Or, if you ask another question about the loss of my eye, you agree to contribute £100 to be distributed among our poor, in Laxington."

"All fair and square, Lady Honoria."

"You agree?"

"I do. In my country we deposit stakes. I will write a cheque on my London banker, for £100, and hand it to Mr. Weatherall, to be returned, if I ask but one question; to be forfeited, if I ask another." Mr. Spry signed a cheque for £100 on Coutts's bank, and handed the draft to the Rector.

"Now, my lady, are you ready?"

"Yes; ask your question Mr. Spry."

"My Lady Honoria Weatherall how did you lose the sight of your left eye?"

"*I was shot by Mr. Weatherall!*"

The Yankee started from his chair; sank

down again, stared at Lady Honoria, and delivered a volley, or rather a running fire of questions, such as :—"You ain't joking? You raally mean it? Shot by your husband? Before, or after marriage? *Haöw*? When? Where? What with? Gun? Pistol? Or catapult? Did he shoot you on purpose, or by accident? Was it a quarrel, or a misunderstanding? Or *haöw*?" He drew breath, and began again. "I reckon I never felt so curious in my life. If I didn't conclude, in my own mind, it was an accident in the hunting-field. But you say Mr. Weatherall did it. What with? *Haöw* was it anyway? Du tell. My!"

Lady Honoria could no longer refrain from laughing. The Yankee said: "Scissors! I realise I've lost my bet."

"Here, take back your cheque, Mr. Spry. It was a joke." The Rector handed the draft across the table.

"Not I, Mr. Weatherall. Keep the cheque. This old hoss never goes back on a bet fairly lost. Guess I'll make it £200 ef you'll tell me all about the accident."

"No, no, Mr. Spry, we shall not take advantage of your generosity. If you freely give this £100 to our poor——"

"I du most heartily. A hundred pound sterling ain't a circumstance to me."

"Then I accept your gift thankfully. But the satisfaction of an old friend's natural curiosity, shall not cost you another penny."

Here, Lady Honoria rose. Mr. Spry gallantly opened the door. The gentlemen were left *tete-à-tete*. The Rector related how Lady Honoria had lost her eye. The American spared his host no details on the painful subject. Mr. Spry resembled Mr. Trollope's "American Senator." "Any prevarication or attempt at mystification fell to the ground at once, under the Senator's tremendous powers of enquiry." An hour elapsed. Still the cross-questioning went briskly forward. A footman entered, with Lady Honoria's summons to the drawing-room.

With a sigh of relief, the Rector said: "Will you take any more wine, Mr. Spry?"

"No sir," said the Yankee, reluctantly consenting to drop the subject—*for the present!*

We gaze into the vista of the future. We see the marriage of our hero and heroine, blessed with two children, a boy and a girl. Angels have not ceased to visit earth. They come in the guise of Children. It would be superfluous to describe the parents' happiness, or that of the delighted grand-parents, Mrs. Weatherall, and the Earl of Laxington. A still greater happiness awaited the Earl. After his daughter's marriage, he felt lonely in his ancestral halls. He therefore resolved to make the doubtful experiment of second nuptials. His daughter cordially approved his intention and his choice—Mrs. Rippington. This lady had been a widow for ten years. She was younger than Miss Wildgoose, better

looking, and her complete contrast in manners and views. Miss Wildgoose had always despised Mrs. Rippington as mild, retiring, and "weak minded." The Earl admired her for her resemblance to his first wife. Within a year of their union, the chimes rang another merry peal, to celebrate the birth of an heir to the title and estate. Blessed in his daughter, son-in-law, wife, and infant son, the Earl seemed to renew his youth. Like all happy men his habits were regular. He gave up hunting. He has the prospect of reaching a patriarchal age.

How happy was Laxington, with such a lord of the manor, and such a Rector. The Laxingtonians hope and trust, that their beloved Rector, and his idolised wife, will never be induced to leave them, till translated—not to a better "living," but to a better world. Yet the parishioners, somewhat inconsistently, boast that no clergyman more deserves preferment than "our pearson." And worthy Mr Stedfast says, Some bishops cannot show a purer life-record, than the Rector, formerly called "The Wild Curate."

FINIS.



